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FOLLY MORRISON.

A Fable.

BY
FRANK BARRETT.

IN THREE VOLUMES.
VOL. I.



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FOLLY MORRISON.



BOOK I.



CHAPTER I.

THE PARENTS OF FOLLY.

FOLLY MORRISON was born in this Christian country the year of grace 1816. Had he been born 1816 years before the light of Christianity first fell upon the earth his temporal condition and prospects could have been no worse.

He was born in a workhouse ; and, according to the general order of things, he was to work hard some fifty or sixty years for the

benefit of his more fortunate fellow-creatures, and then, when he could serve them no longer, return to the workhouse, there to die and for ever after be forgotten.

From this thralldom the State gave him one means of escape ; he could, when he attained to his full muscular development, go out of the country as a soldier, to be shot for the glory of those who reap.

This alternative, with all its advantages, was offered him in the year 1850 by a very civil recruiting-sergeant, whom he met in the town of Guildford, whither he had gone to sell a load of hay for his master ; but as John Morrison at that time had a wife and children to keep from the workhouse, and was tenderly disposed towards them, he was compelled to decline the tempting proposal, and so lost the very best chance of happiness he ever had. It was not for him to shorten his troubles by twenty years.

He was a sharp, quick lad, well recommended by the master, and so before he had learnt to write he was taken from the workhouse by farmer Marsh, one of the guardians, who undertook to clothe, feed, shelter, educate, and, lastly, work him.

It was a good bargain for Master Marsh.

John was fed upon bread and water chiefly ; a little cheese and boiled pork-fat were his luxuries. He was clothed in the discarded garments of the farmer's son, sheltered in a hay-loft, educated in scaring crows, cleaning horses, and tending cows, and finally set to do any job that his strength and intelligence were equal to.

At fifteen he did the work of any one country labourer, and that is about six times as much as any London workman will permit himself to do.

Until he was sixteen he never got a penny, except for killing rats in his spare time ; then he became an independent farm labourer at ten shillings a week, working from sunrise to sunset in the summer, and from five o'clock in the morning until eight in the evening during the dark months. He was such an admirable servant that Mr. Marsh gave him employment all the year round, so John was not compelled to spend Christmas with his less favoured fellow-workmen in the union poor-house.

He was a dextrous, steady, quick labourer—the very best on the farm. He could turn his hand to anything, from tarring the outside of a barn to threshing out its contents.

He would have excelled at whatever he gave his undivided attention to, and in a city might have risen to be a builder, architect, engineer—anything where a clear brain and a sure hand avail.

At eighteen a neighbouring farmer offered him thirteen shillings a week for the same services he had been rendering farmer Marsh for ten.

John Morrison put the case before his master.

‘Why, surely you won’t leave me, John, after I’ve been so good to you, will you?’ exclaimed farmer Marsh, in an injured tone.

‘I don’t want to be ungrateful. I’d be content to work with one master all my life; but then a young fellow must look arter hisself while he can,’ replied John.

‘Well, I shall give you thirteen; but you must do your best to earn it,’ said his master.

John took the increased wages, and, in gratitude, worked harder than ever, so that even farmer Marsh considered he did not lose much by the extravagant advance. When the neighbouring farmer, who was at open enmity with farmer Marsh, offered John an advance of another shilling upon the terms previously offered, he declined, and said

nothing of the matter to his master, feeling, without exactly knowing why, that he was in some inevitable manner under a debt of gratitude to him. Farmer Marsh came to know of the offer indirectly, and, taking John's silence to imply a secret intention to accept it, he was uneasy. He could not afford to part with John ; at the same time he did not see how he could afford to keep him if this bidding of the opposition was to continue.

‘That’s the worst of these young fellows,’ he said to his wife ; ‘there’s no managing of ’em while they are single. I wish he would marry and have children ; it would be much better for himself and everybody else.’

(‘Everybody else’ was himself, of course.)

‘You’re too lenient,’ replied Mrs. Marsh. ‘If you worked him a little closer he wouldn’t have time to go gossiping about and getting discontented. It’s just the same with the gels. If you give ’em a day to run home and see their friends, they reward you for it the next morning by giving you notice to leave.’

‘It’s not in my nature to be a hard master. I’d much rather see that lad married and settled down with a wife and family, so as he

couldn't leave, than let him go to that Evans for the sake of another shilling a week.'

The farmer was inconsequent, but he spoke honestly the feelings of his heart.

'I've seen him hanging about the dairy a good deal lately,' said Mrs. Marsh; 'and I've had to scold Joan a dozen times this week for staring out of the kitchen window.'

'Well, don't scold her any more, my dear. Let the gel look out of the window a bit, and I'll set John to mending them pigsties up, so as he shall be about the house, like.'

'Bless your heart, that won't make any difference. The best way to make pigeons want to pair is to keep 'em apart.'

'Women folk know more about that sort of thing than we,' answered farmer Marsh, laughing. 'I don't care how it's managed, so long as you bring 'em together somehow. All I know is that there'll be no keeping that young fellow in his place unless he's tied so as he can't move.'

Farmer Marsh did not see any duties outside those of farming well and observing the laws of his country. Perhaps there is not a farmer in England at the present day who would regard his servant's interest equally with his own—who would put him in the way

of becoming something better than a good servant. Marsh thought he was doing a good thing for John Morrison in keeping him from roving about the country, and saw nothing debasing to human kind in treating it like poultry. The moral responsibilities of keeping servants did not trouble him in the least. All that concerned him was the payment of wages at the end of the week, and the rent and tithes when they became due. The tithes were heavy enough, in all conscience, and if John Morrison's moral welfare was neglected the parson was to blame, argued Marsh.

So John was set the next day to mend 'them pigsties,' and Joan looked frequently from the kitchen window.

Joan was a Devonshire girl, buxom and strong, with dark hair and dark eyes, and the bright red blood showing through the creamy yellow skin of her cheeks; John was an equally good specimen of a Surrey man, long-limbed, broad-chested, and fair. The affinity of these two was in accordance with the principles of natural selection.

Nature never hurries; she accomplishes her ends by slow means. 'Them pigsties' were finished before John and Joan had ex-

changed half-a-dozen remarks, and for some time after the expression of their feelings was restricted to side glances and broad smiles. But one could foresee the end by the pains Joan took to make John jealous, and his readiness to take offence.

She had several admirers, and among them was James Ledger, a man whom John Morrison cordially hated and despised. Ledger was a mean, pitiful rat of a man, who had served as a tiger to Sir Andrew Aveling, when the baronet was a young buck associating with the Jerry Hawthornes of his day, and had been appointed gamekeeper when Sir Andrew married, because he had not the necessary dimensions for a footman, and was no longer wanted to swing behind a tilbury. For this office he was admirably fitted. No ferret ever unearthed a wretched rabbit with more address than he discovered a poacher, and brought his iniquities to light. He knew all the bad characters of the neighbourhood, and betrayed them readily. It was not his way to confront a depredator, take his gun away, and turn him off the estate; he couldn't do that. His method was to creep upon the offenders, note who they were, and then quietly withdraw un-

seen, to send a constable to them the next day, and 'bench them' at once.

As farmer Marsh was Sir Andrew's tenant, and the baronet reserved his shooting rights, the keeper was frequently at Mayford farm, and more frequently about the house than was necessary, generally contriving to bring a pair of rabbits for the farmer about five minutes after he and his wife had jogged off to market in the pony-cart. There he would stand at the side-door gossiping with the girls until John Morrison came striding up, looking as black as a thunder-cloud; then he would skip off with the nimbleness of a tailor.

'I wonder you haven't better sense than to talk wi' a fool like that!' said John one day to Joan, who to vex him had lingered at the door, and was following the little keeper with her eyes as he skipped across the field.

'They're not all wise as keeps their mouths shet,' retorted she; 'an' it's better listening to fools as can talk pleasant than to them as can only speak when they've got some'at to find fault wi'.'

John did not reply to this sarcasm. He knew his own conversational shortcomings, and was willing to admit them; but besides

this, he could think of nothing to reply on the spot, although a very biting answer occurred to him about two hours after.

Long before then he had forgiven her.

‘It’s only natural she should like to hear what’s going on up at the hall, and as for that little cur Ledger, she *can’t* care for him,’ thought John.

As usual in these cases, it was the aggressor who felt the aggrieved party, and Joan resented John’s jealousy almost as much as she would have resented his indifference. She gave her smiles to the man she did not care for, and her frowns to him she really loved. This caprice of love was understood by Mrs. Marsh, but it provoked her husband prodigiously.

‘The gel’s a forrard hussey, and John’s a fool to take it as he do. It will serve her right if he takes and marries another gel out of spite.’

‘Leave them alone, my dear; it will all come right presently. You men don’t understand these matters,’ replied Mrs. Marsh.

‘It’s a new sort of love-making, as I don’t want to understand no more than these new-fangled steam-engines and gas-lights, and things that are turning the old world upside

down. All I know is, I wouldn't a stood no such nonsense.'

Despite Mrs. Marsh's prognostication that all would come right, all seemed to be going quite wrong. John grew gloomier, and Joan more exasperating every day. She encouraged James Ledger to such an extent that the little man believed she loved him and would be his wife for the asking. It was something to have a big sweetheart like Joan, and cut out a rival like John Morrison, who was acknowledged to be the best-looking fellow and the handiest about those parts, and he did not conceal his triumph.

The slightest scraps of gossip get circulated widely in the country, where there is little news to talk about, and John was twitted from all sides about his ill-fortune in having such a man as little Jim Ledger for a rival. He bore that, but when he caught the keeper presenting a bunch of flowers to Joan, with all the airs of a fine gentleman, his power of endurance gave way, and, taking his rival by the collar, he led him down to the horse-pond and ducked him in like a sheep.

'Now you can go and tell your friends what John Morrison's given you,' said he, setting the gasping keeper on his feet; 'and

if you come here with any of your flunkey graces again, I'll give you something more to brag about.'

Ledger sneaked away, muttering threats of vengeance, which were not idle, coming from his heart.

John turned towards the house, where Joan was standing a spectator of her admirer's discomfiture, with his bunch of flowers in her hand. *She* was not afraid of John Morrison, and stood her ground bravely as he came up to her.

'Joan,' said he, 'give me they flowers.'

'Not I,' she replied, clapping the *casus belli* behind her.

'Then throw 'em away.'

'Nor that neither. I ain't afeeard. You can't throw me in the horse-pond.'

'I shouldn't care for ye well enough to trouble myself, if I could,' he answered. Then he caught hold of her empty hand, and said, 'Now look here, lass; you have flunkey chap's love in one hand and mine in t'other—drop which you will, and so be it.'

'Why, if you think a shapely Devonshire lass is to be coarted and won in that fashion, I'll drop yours quick enough, and you may take it to a wench that's less particular.'

And with that Joan flung his hand aside, and walked into her dairy with the carriage of a queen, leaving John to walk off and try to forget her.

It was a hard job to forget her, but John kept resolutely away from her, and wouldn't go near the house. But he kept his eye on the approaches.

It gratified him to see that his warning was taken by the keeper. James Ledger avoided Mayford as the rat does the trap that has taken his tail off.

Joan was left with never a lover now ; but that she didn't mind—for the first day. If John had been within a couple of hundred yards he would have heard her singing.

It was on the third day after the quarrel that farmer Marsh, coming to John Morrison, who was billing a hazel hedge, said :

‘What 'a been doing to Joan, lad?’

‘I, master? Nowt.’

‘Then don't 'e do it again, lad, or you'll break the gel's heart.’

‘I'll pitch that whipper-snapper into t' horse-pond again, if he comes dancing about here like a merry-andrew, wi' his flowers and his flunkey manners.’

‘I don't mind 'e pitching Ledger into

pond, thof he be landlord's keeper ; but 'tain't that upsets the gel. Why don't 'e take and marry the wench, lad ? She's anigh broken-hearted (and serve her right for playing fast and loose, say I) ; but the wife says she can't have her crying about the house all day.'

'What ! crying ?' exclaimed John.

'Aye ; and wife says she must pack her off if she won't stop it. Why, she's done nowt but cry ever sin' yesterday marning. Go to her, lad.'

John did not want bidding. He threw down his bill, and ran off to the house as hard as he could go, with pity and love and remorse seething together in his heart.

Joan was feeding the geese, with such a face as James Ledger would not have recognised at another time. Her eyes were puffed, her nose swollen and red. She did not hear John coming over the turf. In one hand she held a pan of wet barley meal, with the other she cast it out to the geese, occasionally taking up a corner of her apron with her wet finger and thumb to staunch her tears. Everything that Joan did she went through with thoroughly—crying included.

'My poor lass !—I never thought to ha' grieved thee so ; and if I'd known you loved

me, I'd never been harsh with 'e,' cried John, coming to her side.

Down went the pan and the spoon, and Joan, flinging her arms round John's neck, hugged him to her bosom, and kissed him, crying copiously all the while.

'I've been to blame, John. I were a fool, I were, to give a word or a look to that mincing little fool, while there was a great, strong man a-loving me treuly. An' I ha' repented, John; an' if you'd only looked in the pig's trow yesterday you'd ha' seen they dratted flowers, ye would; an' you know I love you, John.'

'Why, then, we'll be married, lass, Michaelmas fair-day next, and you shall never shed another tear so long as you live if I can help it.'

And on Michaelmas Day they were married, and spent their honeymoon seeing the sights at Cat'en Hill Fair, and in the evening they went to their new home in Sandy Lane.

Thus, after two months of not very cheerful romance, John Morrison came to the realities of life.



CHAPTER II.

FOOD AND CLOTHES.—THREE-HALFPENCE A DAY.

MAYFORD is four miles from Guildford, and thirty by the road from London. It stands on the outskirts of the common which stretches from Reading to London, and is no more than a pleasant walk from Hyde Park Corner, yet virtually it was as far removed from civilisation as if it had stood on the outskirts of Sahara.

All that the inhabitants of Sandy Lane ever saw of civilisation was an occasional highwayman on his way to Bagshot, for as late as 1840 travellers were not safe there; or a pair of prize-fighters from London, who came thither with their train of gentlemen and blackguards to fight their battles out undisturbed.

Parsons came from the universities to preach a doctrine which none understood; gentlemen came to hunt and enjoy themselves; but nobody came with the view of making the peasants happier or better.

They were left to themselves more completely than if they had been Africans.

They could speak, and in that they were superior to the rabbits; but the advantage lay with the rabbits as far as happiness was concerned. And these people lived just outside the greatest city in the world, and this was the condition of things when John Morrison took his wife home and prepared to face the realities of life.

John was then in his twentieth year, vigorous and cheerful, and he found a married life not half such a serious business as old people considered it. He and Joan lived very comfortably on thirteen shillings a week. It was almost as comfortable when his first child was born, and only became palpably different when the third had to be provided for. After that the work seemed harder and the comfort less. Every additional mouth made his share of the loaf smaller, and he found it impossible to work without exhaustion with insufficient in his stomach. The

problem ever present in his mind was, How are we to live? And this difficulty became greater every year, as his family increased.

The children were all healthy and hardy as the offspring of such parents would be; and in 1853, there were eleven of them to provide for out of thirteen shillings a week.

The rent of the cottage in Sandy Lane was half-a-crown a week; and when that was taken off, farmer Marsh gave John Morrison eleven shillings and sixpence. This eleven shillings and sixpence was to feed and clothe thirteen human beings for seven days, making the share of each member of the family a fraction over three-halfpence per day. A pig could not be kept in wash and litter for the price; an ordinary hen costs more. Only human ingenuity could keep body and soul together on such a pittance.

John Morrison grew dull and old, poor Joan lean and careworn, in this struggle for life. John's hair was streaked with grey at thirty-three; Joan looked fifty. John could not have told you how the cravings of his growing youngsters were appeased. His duty was to work hard and give his wife the money to spend as only she could spend it. Meat the mother and children never ate;

about two ounces of pork-fat and a loaf were given to John to work his fifteen or eighteen hours a day upon. Bread soaked in hot water with boiled vegetables were the chief subsistence of the rest.

Things could not be worse, though the family should still increase, for Jack, the eldest boy, could already use the clappers, and in another year Tom, the second son, would be able to mind cows, and so by degrees the elder ones might be got out to work and make room for the younger.

Once a week Joan locked up her children and trudged off to Guildford for the week's supply of provisions : in the fog of autumn or the cutting east winds of spring, in the stifling heat of summer or the piercing cold of winter, it was all the same, the woman could be seen bent beneath the weight of two heavy baskets toiling along the weary road.

Sometimes she was lucky enough to get a commission from a farmer's wife to bring a joint of meat or a parcel of groceries from the town ; then Joan carried three baskets. It made her stagger a little going up the hills, that extra twelve or thirteen pounds weight, but she was glad to carry the load for a bunch

of carrots or turnips, or perhaps a few old rags of clothes to cut up and make into coverings for her children's backs.

What we call amusements, entertainments, and the like were unknown to John and his wife—they did not get even relaxation.

They had neither feast-days nor holidays.

Their one source of supreme gratification was that they had strength to work and keep out of the workhouse.

Neither husband nor wife could read, and their children were as ignorant as savages. The nearest school was four miles distant.

Religion was but a name to them. They had a vague fear of the hereafter as a state even more terrible than their present condition, of a God that would plunge them in eternal torment for their misfortunes and ignorance. What could they know of Divine love in their perpetual struggle with adversity? The rector of the parish thought he had discharged his duty to them sufficiently in return for his wages of two thousand a year, with a rectory and glebe lands, by sending his curate now and then to ask them questions which they could not answer, and to warn them against heresy. They never went to church, because *that* church was not for them.

It is ludicrous to think what would have happened if those gaunt parents had walked into the ornamental church with their eleven ragged and barefooted children behind them.—ludicrous and pathetic too. Would the rector have brought them a loaf and bid them warm themselves at the stove? or would he have instructed the pew-opener to turn them out or to huddle them away out of sight in a corner of the cold stony aisle?

It would be wrong to say that these people had no hope, for that sentiment is co-existent with fear; and as the dread of going into the workhouse was ever before them, it may be said that they were never without hope—of staying out of it. That encouraged them to be frugal and industrious.

Master Marsh was quite right in his calculations. John Morrison was secure enough now. He was not likely to relinquish a good place for one only possibly better. He could not afford to risk the probability of being discharged by a new master when the harvesting was over. He was no longer a young man unfettered, who could walk up to London and support himself for a week or two without work while he was finding a good situation. A couple of days without work now

would oblige him to take his wife and family to the poorhouse for food and shelter.

Farmer Marsh was satisfied with John Morrison, and used to point him out as an example of the contented and useful servant an English peasant could be under a considerate master.

Useful he certainly was ; but contented ? —No.

It would seem that he had sufficient to think about in doing his daily work, without troubling his head about such abstractions as justice and injustice, right and wrong, or in trying to solve the question, ‘ What do I live for ? ’ Nevertheless these matters did greatly perplex him.

He kept his opinions to himself, for the constant practice of economy—of doing nothing which was not advantageous—governed even his tongue. Why should he talk of his troubles ? What good would it do him or his to tell that he was ill-satisfied with the dispensations of Providence ?

Nevertheless his feelings found expression and were made known, astonishing farmer Marsh as greatly as an eruption of Primrose Hill would surprise the dwellers in its vicinity.

One day John Morrison said to farmer Marsh, as they were looking at the ravages made on the standing corn by the hedge-birds :

‘A lad might earn a shilling a week by scaring of the birds ; and my Jack is a smarty kind o’ lad, can holler louder ’an a man, and have been learning to use t’ clappers these three weeks.’

‘Let him come in, and we will see what we can do wi’ him, John. So you have a son old enough to work ?’

‘The gel’s a year older.’

‘Ah, gels are more awkward to do wi’, but in a couple o’ years she may go out and do a bit scullery-work. Bless me, how the time goes ! Why, how long have you been on the farm, John ?’

‘Nigh on five-and-twenty year, master.’

‘Five-and-twenty year !’ echoed farmer Marsh, his bosom swelling with the thought of his own benevolence in keeping a servant so long. His feelings were almost paternal towards John Morrison. ‘Five-and-twenty year ! It must be a satisfaction, like, to you, John, to think you’ve kept a place winter and summer all they years, and that your son’s like to do the same, eh ? Why don’t you answer,

man? What makes ye look so down i' mouth ?

‘It must be t’ satisfaction of it, master ; looking back upon the past and thinking as the future of that there poor little chap is to be no better. Here will he stand, a growed man, and ask the question that I ask myself now—What wrong did I do that my father should treat me worse than a pup or a kit ? Why did he serve me less merciful than them ? Why did he not tie a stone about my neck, and fling me in a pond before I could suffer, when he saw there were too many of us in the world, and that I was not wanted ?’



CHAPTER III.

JOHN MORRISON BECOMES A THIEF.

FARMER MARSH was not certain whether to regard John Morrison as a lunatic or a Radical.

It was quite possible that the July sun had softened his brain—it was equally possible that he had been listening to the inflammatory eloquence of those unprincipled agitators who go up and down in the land, sending the farmer's best men to the colonies and raising the price of labour.

Under either condition he was greatly to be pitied, and his symptoms could be regarded only with the most serious apprehensions.

John Morrison was included in the long list of complaints which farmer Marsh had to lay before his landlord in extenuation of

deficient dressing, imperfect draining, etc., and as Sir Andrew Aveling was walking over Mayford farm to see how the game promised, his tenant said :

‘The men are just as conträry as the weather, Sir Andrew. They’re just like the roots and the stock and market prices—they ain’t what they used to be—nothing like. Why, look at that man there, sir—John Morrison—a man that my father took on the farm when he didn’t hardly know the difference twixt a plough and a harrow—a man as I’ve kept in constant work by the year, and never stopped so much as a week in the severest weather—a man as I’ve give thirteen shilling a week to ever since he was nineteen y’r old—well, he’s discontented. Talks about farm labourers being wus off ’an pups and kits, because they’re allowed to live when they’re not wanted. Talks about men being bound to treat their fellow-creatures as well as they treat themselves, or else to destroy them.’

‘Ah, this arises from teaching them to read and——’

‘But he can’t read a word.’

‘More shame for him—he ought to, that’s all I can say. I’ve heard of this John Mor-

rierson from my keeper Ledger, and, according to all accounts, he's a very dangerous sort of fellow. I advise you to keep a sharp eye on him, Marsh. Do you give him any rabbits?

'No, sir; no.'

'Then I warrant he takes 'em. Have him up before the bench if you catch him at it, and I promise you he shall suffer for it. These radical ideas are gaining ground, and must be repressed by the firm hand of justice, or ground will presently be worth not a pound an acre. He looks a heavy, plotting kind of man. Keep your eye on him, Marsh, and I'll just speak to my man Ledger about him.'

'He's not dishonest, Sir Andrew—only his opinions are wrong.'

'What a confounded inconsistent fellow you are, Marsh! With one breath you accuse the man, with the next you excuse him. Do you think it's possible for a man's principles and practices to be at variance? Nonsense! If his opinions are bad, his actions must be dishonest too. That's logic.'

It was not for the farmer to argue the matter with his landlord—a baronet and a justice of the peace—so Marsh said no more

about Morrison, and only hoped the man would keep out of Ledger's way.

* * * * *

James Ledger watched John Morrison with the patient vigilance of a cat.

He had a long-standing grudge to gratify and a master to please.

During the harvesting John had so much work to do that there was no scope for malice to invent a charge against him. He and his little Jack walked to work at four in the morning and left it at nine at night.

When the harvest was carried there was no more work for the boy, and John walked to and from the farm alone.

Ledger became hopeful.

November came in wet and cold ; John's clothes at night-time were damp through, and had to be dried after he was in bed. Fuel was scarce—the load of faggots which farmer Marsh usually gave his man at the beginning of the winter had not yet been sent—he was short of wood himself, having put off wood-cutting in order to get the ground worked before the frost bound the earth.

‘Ye must bring a mite o’ wood home wi’

you, John, if you can, for the turfs won't last by 'emselves,' said Joan.

John asked his master for permission to take home a faggot.

'I can't spare ne'er a one from the stack, but you may take a bit if you see it lying about,' answered Marsh.

John managed to find a few sticks, and with these trudged homewards in the evening.

Part of Sandy Lane runs alongside Aveling Park. The fence there had been out of repair for years, and in one place the posts had rotted, and a yard or so of the paling had fallen down in the wide ditch.

Coming to this point John stopped. In the dim light he could just see the dark wood lying among the brake. There was enough rotting there to keep the fire going for a week. Why should it lie there useless? He set one foot in the ditch and found a loose batten or two. He added them to his load, and carried them home.

'Aye, that's good!' said Joan. 'Bring the like to-morrow, lad, and we'll bide through Sunday.'

The next night John got into the ditch and felt about. There was not much besides

the main piece, but he collected what fragments there were, and carried home about as much as, chopped up, would fill a bushel basket. 'It's no one's property laying there in the open ditch, and it's o' no value to Sir Andrew,' thought John.

About two hours after he had come home, as he was sitting by the fire with his baby on his knee—they were never without a baby in that house—the door opened and Graves the constable walked in, followed by the sinister little keeper.

'Halloa! John Morrison; you've been doing what you oughtn't to, eh?' said Graves, cheerfully.

'What do you mean, Master Graves?'

'Why, you've got a bit o' wood on your fire there as don't belong to you, that's all.'

'And there's another bit up in the corner,' piped out James Ledger, whose sharp eye had detected the property.

'That—that's only waste—it's of no value—it's——'

John Morrison could hardly speak, and his arm that held the baby trembled violently.

'Well, anyway you must come along o' me. I dare say Sir Andrew won't be hard on you when he finds it's only a bit o' stuff like

that; but I must do my duty, so come along.'

'Joan,' said John, rising and speaking huskily, 'run down, my good lass, and tell Master Marsh what has happened, and—here—take t' baby.'

Fortunately for John Morrison, Justice was dozing when he was brought to Aveling Hall. Sir Andrew had dined heavily, and with a bottle of port at his elbow, was gently snoring in the lounge-chair before the library fire. No one dared to wake him for such a trifling matter as that in which a mere farm-labourer was concerned, and so John was taken into the servants' hall to await the awaking of Justice. He sat there, silent and listless, his elbows resting on his knees, his fingers knit, his head bent, while the servants indulged their curiosity, and his captors told of his offence, and ventured conjectures on the punishment awaiting him. He took no notice of those about him or their remarks; he was dead to everything but one question. 'If so be I am sent to gaol, what'll become of the young 'nes and the wife, and how'll she fare with the little 'ne that's to be born come January?'

Meanwhile, Joan, with her shawl wrapped

loosely about her head, ran without stopping to Mayford Farm, and got there while lights still glimmered in the lower windows.

It was nine o'clock nearly, and farmer Marsh had yawned thrice. Mrs. Marsh was preparing the chamber candle.

Panting for breath, and with hysterical utterance, Joan told her tale, and implored the farmer to save her John from being carried to prison.

Marsh, as he listened, thought, first, 'I'm not going out this time o' night, when I ought to be in bed, to irritate my landlord for nothing at all.' Then, 'Who's to carry that load o' barley I promised to send to Guildford o' Monday if John's locked up in prison?' After that, 'It will never do to lose John while there's that barley to clear.' And lastly, 'I'll go and see what can be done, for John's sake. I should have to go all the way to Guildford if the case is sent before the bench.'

So, grumbling in a loud voice, he put on his thick coat, and bidding Joan go home and look after her children, he went across the meadows to Aveling Hall.

Joan went by the road, and sat down in the fog by the lodge-gate, waiting, with a

terrible anxiety at her heart, for the sound of footsteps to come down the broad walk.

And while she sat there with a tumult of emotion in her heart, while the wet mist was soddening her rags of clothes so that they hung in heavy, clammy folds about her wretched limbs, while the fog was laying the seeds of disease in her lungs, and the cold was numbing her feet and hands, Justice still dozed before the warm fire.

How long did she sit there? She knew not. There was no sound to mark the passing hours. All was still as death. It seemed to her that the night must have gone and morning be at hand. She rose from her seat and crept along by the lodge-gates, trying to pierce the darkness with her eyes, and see if any light glimmered in the hall. Darkness only less profound than the silence prevailed. Standing in the middle of the road, a sense of unreality possessed her mind. She could see nothing, hear nothing, feel nothing. It was as if she stood in an infinite void. Only when she moved and passed her hands along the gates was this impression removed.

Suddenly, with startling distinctness, the great clock of the hall began to strike.

She counted the strokes. 'One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten.' Had she waited there, then, barely an hour?

She sat down on the wet bank, rocking herself from side to side, but still with her senses alert.

The awful silence was unbroken until eleven struck; and then the stillness came again.

A sound as light as the dropping of a leaf fell upon her ear, and she started to her feet, holding her breath to listen. A distant door had opened. Voices she heard and recognised, farmer Marsh's and constable Graves's. She could hear them talking, but why could she not hear her husband? A door shut. Footsteps on the wet gravel drew nearer. Farmer Marsh again spoke, and Graves answered. Was John confined in the hall?

She fancied she heard more than the footsteps of two men coming nearer, nearer. But if John were there, why did he not join in the conversation that Marsh and Graves kept up?

They were quite close now; a step or two would bring them to her. She sank down, powerless with apprehension.

The lodge-gate swung back, the lodge-door

opened, and a stream of light came from within.

A voice in the dark road shrieked out 'John!' and was succeeded by a cadence of sobs.

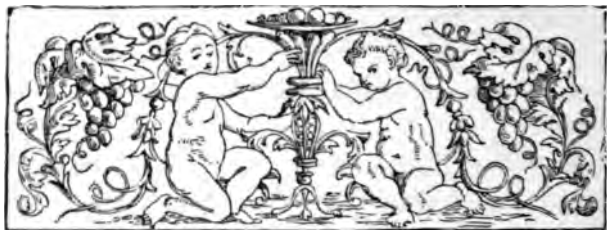
'That's t' wife, lad; go and see to her,' said Graves.

John Morrison ran into the road, and where the sobbing came from he found his wife, sodden and cold, kneeling in the road.

'What, my wench! Rise up. I'm not to go to gaol, after all.'

'Ah, mercy, mercy! I am thankful to my God. Let me feel thy dear face, so. Tell me again, lad, thou art free.'

'Aye, free. But they tell me I'm no longer an honest man.'



CHAPTER IV.

THE DEGRADATION OF JOHN MORRISON.

SIR ANDREW AVELING was unjust to John Morrison in discharging him.

He felt that the better and kinder course was to send him to prison. In his opinion, dishonesty was an original sin, and the heritage of the poor—a disease not to be prevented, scarcely to be cured, and to be checked only by punishment.

He was perfectly certain that John Morrison would have to go to gaol sooner or later. His conscience whispered that he ought to be benched at once. He felt a generous compunction in letting him off.

But a man's natural disposition will assert itself, and Sir Andrew was by nature lenient

and yielding to the wishes of others. He listened to the argument of his tenant, farmer Marsh, who pointed out not only his own inconvenience in losing a good servant, but the burden which would be imposed upon the parish if John Morrison's wife and eleven children had him to support them no longer, and so he allowed his better judgment to be overruled.

Nevertheless, he did his best to make the laws of his country respected, to turn John Morrison back by force of argument into the path of virtue which he had forsaken—in other words, to render him happy.

In dismissing the miserable, bewildered offender, he used all his eloquence to make him understand that justice is not a merciful, impartial arbitrator, but a vindictive avenger, who carries a sword for no idle purpose.

He succeeded in impressing upon the mind of John Morrison the fact that he was no longer an honest man, and had for ever forfeited his claim to the sympathy of decent people—that he must henceforth take an inferior place among his toiling fellows, and lower his eyes to the earth before good men and women, and that he owed his freedom



from a severer punishment to an undue indulgence.

His condemnation received additional weight coming from the lips of Sir Andrew, for the baronet bore an unimpeached character for liberality and kindness. All over the county he was held up as the type of a good old-fashioned English gentleman, whose only fault was a somewhat hasty temper.

John Morrison had himself received soup and blankets from the hall the preceding winter. Looking at him with his stout personable figure, his smooth feminine hands, his soft grey hair, and his florid fair face, with its blue sleepy eyes, it was impossible to believe him guilty of cruelty. Looking at the library in which he sat, with its rows upon rows of large, solemn, ponderous books, its desks and writing paraphernalia, it could not be doubted that he was wise. It was not for John Morrison to know that the books had never been read, and were there merely as an ornamental but necessary adjunct to the shelves.

Most of us can cover our nakedness with some more or less radiant tissue. One has his wit, another his learning, a third his money, and so on. John Morrison had his

honesty, which is indeed a poor rag in popular opinion when compared with others. It was his boast that throughout his hardships he had preserved an unblemished character.

‘I’ve worked man and boy five-and-twenty year an’ more in one place, and never had nothin’ agen me,’ he used to say. This he could say no more. His one thin rag was torn off, and he was turned out in the world for the very beggars to scorn.

Had the word ‘thief’ been branded on his brow, he could not have felt himself more abased.

He walked home with his wife’s hand in his, too engrossed with his own misfortune to notice her wretchedness.

The next day being Sunday he had ample time for reflection. He ate his meals in silence, and between whiles sat in an apathetic state, with his elbows on his knees, and his body bent forward, taking no notice of his children, and answering Joan in monosyllables when she spoke to him.

In the evening, when the children were in bed, the wife pulled a chair beside her husband’s, and said, laying her hand on his arm :

‘Cease frettin’ thyself, John ; things be not so bad as they might have been.’

‘They couldn’t be much worse, wife. What’s to come of the children when it’s known their father’s a thief? Who’ll take ’em to service now?’

‘But thou’rt no thief, lad, or thou’t be not here now.’

‘Sir Andrew to’d me I was, afore Master Graves, and that Jim Ledger heered him. And d’ye think he’ll not tell the tidings to all the folks around? ’Tis so he’ll pay off the old score he has agen me, for taking you away from him in the old days, Joan. Aye, wife, I did ye a bad turn then, for all I loved ye so well.’

‘Talk not like that, lad. Ye know as well as I that I’d rather have ye, just as poor and unfortunate as thee be, than a rat of a man like him. Thou art a man, John. And don’t be thinking folks who know you, and him, too, will believe his lies agen thee.’

‘They’re not lies. I am a thief.’

‘What, for takin’ a handful o’ rubbish out o’ a ditch—a thief? Nay, lad, nay.’

‘You don’t understand the ways of this country, wife. Maybe it’s different in Devonshire, where you come from. Maybe there’s no gentlefolks there, and you’re welcome to take up a bit o’ rubbish another don’t want

and throws aside to rot in the ditch. It makes a power o' difference where people's got plenty of money.'

'Can tell me, John, why it's wrong to take a thing that's o' no value to nobody?'

'That I can't, lass. It ain't for us to know the why and the wherefore of gentlefolks' law. It's their business to make the laws, and ours to suffer by 'em.'

'Well, we must make the best of it. We cannot get away, and we must just bide here till we can't work no more, and our time comes to go to the union and die. So let us think o' the matter no more.'

'How can I help thinkin' of it, when every one I meet will look at me as they didn't used to look?'

'Look at nobody, then, John, till thou come home to thy child'en and thy wife: thou'lt find no difference in the looks of our eyes, save there be more love for thee than ever in thy Joan's.'

Thus Joan comforted her John, as only a wife can comfort her husband. But though she balmed his late wounds, she could not make him invulnerable to further attacks.

In the morning he received a 'good talking to' from farmer Marsh, who counselled

him not only to be more honest for the future, but also to be a 'little less independent like,' and not carry his head so high.

'Why don't ye shake hands and be friends with Ledger? You wouldn't ha' got into this mess if you'd been on good terms with him,' said he.

'If he be paid to do this kind o' work, he must do it same as other servants,' replied John.

'Nonsense! you talk like a fool, John. D'ye think he'd took any notice of you lifting a bit of wood if he hadn't bore you a grudge for laughing and sneering at him, let alone taking his sweetheart away and pitching of him into the horse-pond years gone by? No; it don't do for people that's got to earn their living to be independent. I have to humble myself to the baronet, and you must just bend your back to his keeper. And you do it, too, my lad, or, mark me, it'll be the worse for you before long.'

John Morrison did not reply. He was asking himself this question, 'Am I degraded to the state of a miserable cur, that, for very fear, I must curry favour with the man I most despise?'

Mrs. Marsh also spoke her mind when

John took the morning's milk into the dairy, addressing him in strong, sharp terms before the kitchen wench and dairy-maid, in order that they might share equally with him the benefit of her moral admonitions.

His fellow-labourers said nothing, but their silence was worse than speech to John Morrison. He fancied that everyone must know of his disgrace, and regard him as he had been told to consider himself. He slunk out of the way of his fellows, and, having to cart a load of hay, did double duty rather than have a boy to help him.

Going home at night he saw a man coming towards him. He bent his head and quickened his pace. Poor wretch! he had no need of Joan's suggestion that he should look into no eyes but hers and his children's; his own shame prevented him from looking into others'. Yet, though he kept his eyes upon the path, he felt that he was being looked at; and when the passing stranger, in country fashion, bade him 'Good-night,' he had not strength to answer.

Day after day he suffered from this sense of humiliation, until, like a beaten mule, he was toughened, and grew accustomed to blows.

Finding it impossible to retrieve his lost

position, he tried to reconcile himself to his present condition by comparing it with that of others who had fallen still lower.

Thus in his mind he associated himself with vagabonds, and, by insensible degrees, came to consider himself as one of them.

He grew callous, and suffered less. But the heart that is hardened by pain cannot respond to sensations of pleasure.

He was perpetually dull and heavy, occasionally sullen and morose.

Trifles irritated him at times, and he did not attempt to check his anger.

He met Ledger frequently, but without making any propitiatory advances. He passed by him in silence ; but his mood was defiant rather than independent.

One night they met unexpectedly close by a sand-pit in Sandy Lane.

The keeper was alone.

John Morrison could have wrung his neck and thrown him in the flooded pit easily.

‘Good-evening, John,’ whined the keeper, stopping. ‘I haven’t had a chance of speaking to you lately, and I have wanted to let you know how sorry I was to inform against you about——’

‘You’re paid to do dirty work—do it,’ answered John Morrison, interrupting the little man in his speech, and leaving him abruptly.

‘And I will,’ said Ledger to himself.

The year drew towards its close. Christmas was at hand.

One night Joan said :

‘Christmas is nigh, my man, and we must have a bit o’ meat food, wi’ a pudden for the children.’

‘Where be they to come from? We’re like to get nothing i’ the way of gifts from anyone this winter,’ responded the husband, gloomily.

‘We can do wi’out charity, John. See, here’s a matter o’ nigh on three shillings I ha’ scraped together unbeknown to thee,’ and Joan laid the well-saved silver and pence out before John, who looked at it with his dull eyes in silence.

‘Come, John, brighten up and be thy old self again. Think o’ thy children sleepin’ in there, and mind how glad ’twill make ’em to feast. Put t’ money in thy pocket, and a’ Saturday we’ll walk together to Guildford and settle how to spend it.’

John looked up from the money to his

wife's thin face, then back to the money, which he picked up slowly and silently.

'T has been happy work saving it, puttin' by a penny now and twopence then, and 'twill be still gladder work spending of it wi' thee, my man.'

John took the money up and looked again in Joan's face, which was sunny with pleasure. A tear came in his eye, and when he spoke it was in a husky, yet a gentle tone.

'You be the best wife i' the world, Joan ; and I am but a coward and all full o' shame to think how I brood glum and sowr wi' only my own misfortunes, while you keep a good heart and a cheery smile for others, having to bear your own ill luck and mine as well. Gi' me a kiss, wife dear—so, so ; don't you cry now when we're all our old selves agen like ; dry your poor eyes with my neckercher here—that's it, my good gal ; aye, and on Saturday we'll go together and buy the bit food for child'en, so we will.'

* * * * *

The next day John heard that there was bread and a blanket to be had for the asking by any respectable person who went up to Aveling Hall.

'Respectable person !' thought John ; 'then

they're not for the likes o' me. Would they give them to Joan, I wonder? Better to go wi'out 'em than be refused. 'Twould break t' poor woman's heart if they said, "You can't have 'em because your husband's a thief." 'Twouldn't make any odds to me to be denied, and I'll try, be there chance or none.'

After his work was done he trudged off to the hall, with little hope of success, but a dogged carelessness as to what ignominy might be thrown upon himself.

'Twould be a rare good job to save the wife's money; she'll want it sure enough when the little 'ne comes,' thought he.

The lodge-keeper looked at John Morrison in amaze when he stated the object of his visit, and exclaimed:

'What, you, John Morrison! a blanket and bread for you?'

'Yes, me. Don't 'e think I want it wi' a wife and eleven child'en, and another comin' wi' new year?'

'Well, you can go up and try—you know the way to the servants' hall,' said the lodge-keeper, with a grin. He came out to look at the labourer trudging up towards the house, and murmured, 'Well, there's imperdence for you!'

In the servants' hall were waiting half-a-dozen poor folks, and behind the long oak dining-table, piled with blankets and loaves, stood the housekeeper.

The entrance of John Morrison created quite a small sensation among the group. His audacity obtained for him the immediate attention of the housekeeper.

'And what do you want, my good man?' asked she.

'Blanket and a loaf, please 'm,' answered John.

'For yourself?'

'No, for my wife and young 'nes.'

'I must ask before I give you anything. Mr. Barrows.'

Mr. Barrows, the butler, drew near, seeming no less surprised than others. The housekeeper spoke to him in a low tone, and he went off reluctantly, scratching his ear. Evidently he did not care to mediate between John Morrison and the baronet.

'Tell Sir Andrew I don't ask his charity for myself,' called out John to the retiring butler. 'It's for my eleven innocent children and my wife, whose time's nigh at hand, that I come here a-begging.'

Mr. Barrows paused to hear this instruction

without turning, and then went on his way, still scratching his ear.

Entering the dining-room, where Sir Andrew sat at dinner with his son, Barrows said :

‘If you please, Sir Andrew, here’s that John Morrison in the hall asking for blankets and bread.’

‘What! the man who was brought before me for stealing wood?’

‘Yes, Sir Andrew, the very same; talking in a high voice there, as if the things belonged to him. I should have told the fellow to go about his business at once, but Mrs. Childs, the housekeeper, sir, she said I’d better ask you.’

‘Tell him,’ exclaimed the baronet, indignantly, ‘tell him—he is an insolent, presumptuous—’ The baronet paused, remembering his dignity, and continued, ‘Merely say that there is nothing here for him.’

‘Yes, sir.’ Barrows departed.

Sir Andrew was a widower, with one son. The boy was the delight of his father. The little fellow was then about ten years old, a bright, pretty boy, with the soft hair, fair skin, and blue eyes of his father.

‘Why is John Morrison not to have a

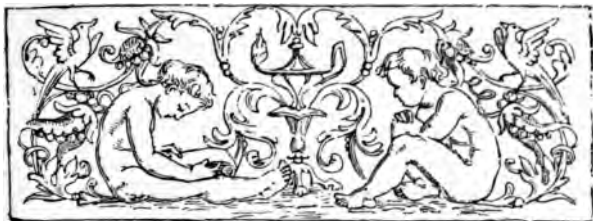
blanket, papa? Isn't he poor enough?' he asked.

'He is poor enough. Yes, my boy.'

'Then doesn't he feel the cold like other poor men?'

'Yes, Roland, yes. He feels the cold, doubtless; but, you see, this John Morrison is not a good man.'

'It must be very wretched not to be a good man. I'm sorry for poor John Morrison, papa.'



CHAPTER V.

JOHN MORRISON STEALS A DEAD HARE.

JOHAN MORRISON took his refusal in the same apathetic manner that he had made his request. He turned from the table without a word, and plodded heavily down the path to the lodge, as if he were conducting a part of his day's labour, and had no sentiment either of joy or sorrow.

The moon was up, and its light, only partially obscured by the watery clouds, revealed objects in the road with tolerable clearness.

As John, nearing his home, entered Sandy Lane, his eyes, still bent upon the ground, caught sight of a hare lying across the path. It was dead. The autumn had been wet,

and many hares had died of the 'rot.' It was reasonable to suppose that this had fallen by the same disease.

John picked it up and felt over its body. He could find no sign of shot wounds.

A hare found under such conditions was worthless. Nobody would have dreamed of eating it, except the father of a starving family.

The thought came to John's mind at once that here was food for his young ones, which would enable him to save the few shillings Joan had saved for a more pressing emergency. What if it had died? Its flesh boiled with a few pot-herbs would be savoury and eatable, and a stay to the cravings of nature. Necessity is not nice in its choices.

John determined to take the thing home. At that moment it occurred to him that to take a dead hare from the public road might be as dishonest as taking a handful of rotten wood.

He hesitated, more than half-minded to fling his late acquisition into the adjoining copse. Then he thought of his children and his wife.

After all, the hare was worthless, and it might not be dishonest to take it. Conscience

told him he had no right to anything in the world but fourteen shillings a week.

The hare slipped from his hands and fell at his feet, but he still stood there with temptation.

‘Suppose it be dishonest,’ he argued, ‘what then? I am a thief. Shall I not thieve? Nothing can make me honest. No one will treat me as an honest man. Can any theft make me more than a thief? What does it matter so that I am not discovered?’

He looked around him. Not a twig in the adjoining copse stirred; the dead brake lay motionless. He listened. Not a whispering breeze nor a distant step broke the silence.

He stooped down, picked up the hare, and walked on with it, a strange excitement in his breast, an odd singing in his head. It was the first truly dishonest act of his life—the result of being treated as a thief.

He had not walked a dozen yards when his apprehensive ear caught the sound of a shrill whistle and breaking underwood in the copse. He stopped, his heart beating quickly. He was not mistaken, the snapping of dead wood was distinct, unguarded, and close at hand.

John Morrison’s home was not more than

five or six hundred yards distant, and his first impulse on hearing the sound was to drop the hare and take to his heels ; but the reflection that he might be pursued and overtaken within Joan's hearing checked him. Moreover, it was contrary to his natural disposition to take a cowardly course.

He grasped the hare tighter and waited. His suspense was momentary. A few rapid steps, and then George Lough, Sir Andrew's under-keeper, leapt from the copse over the brake and stood before John Morrison ; a second after James Ledger rose from the fern-covered ditch in the rear and joined his companion.

‘Halloa, John Morrison ! what have you got now ?’ he asked.

‘A dead hare. I picked it up in the path there, and you know it.’

‘It's my duty to find out these things, as you said the other day, and I must do it,’ said Ledger, getting behind the elbow of George Lough, a big fearless man, who had been a poacher in his boyhood and lived all his life in the woods.

‘You needn't fear me, Jim Ledger,’ said John, with a grating laugh ; ‘I shan't beat you, though ye be a cur. Come, tell us what

ye want, George Lough, like a man ; be it the hare or me ?

‘Both,’ piped out the little keeper. ‘Bring him along to the hall, Lough.’

‘Hands off, lad !’ said John, as Lough drew nearer. ‘I’ll make no trouble. Will ye go in front or behind, Ledger ?’

Ledger walked behind, despite the sarcasm, and Lough at the right hand of John Morrison, who carried the hare unconsciously.

‘I’m glad ’twas no nearer home,’ thought he, ‘or the wife would have heard the voices and been alarmed about nothing at all. Sir Andrew can do nothing to me but call me hard names, and I am past caring for such. Hard words break no bones. The hare’s just as I found it—no better and no worse, and a man can’t be punished for lifting a thing up to see what it is. He’ll see as it was a rotten one, and no use to nobody. The worst he can do is to throw a power of long words at me, caution me, and threaten me ; that won’t harm me.’

He was no longer excited. His mind settled down into its sullen, sluggish state, and he prepared himself to meet the baronet with calm indifference to all he could say.

Once more he walked up the drive, and entered the servants' hall with the same heavy, measured tread as before, and with no more concern in his face.

The lodge-keeper and his wife, the house-keeper and Mr. Barrows, were yet talking of John Morrison's audacity when this fresh instance of his rash daring was brought to astound them. Not less astonished was Sir Andrew when the butler informed him that 'that John Morrison' was in the hall again, having been taken by the keepers in the act of stealing a hare.

Sir Andrew, having finished his dinner, ordered the poacher to be brought before him at once in the library.

Thither John was led, with the hare in one hand, his hat in the other. The servants, clustered at an angle of the stairs, tittered at this odd combination of simplicity and guilt, and followed him with their eyes until the library door closed upon him.

'So you are here again, John Morrison?' said the baronet. 'It is exactly as I expected. I did wrong in not benching you for your first offence. Come nearer to the light and let me look at you, rascal. What is that you carry in your hand?'

‘A dead hare,’ answered John, holding it up to be seen.

‘Took him with it in his hand just as he is now,’ said Ledger.

‘Well, what is your defence?’ asked Sir Andrew, addressing John and raising his voice as if the culprit were deaf.

‘Defence?’ echoed John, vaguely.

‘Yes. What have you to say for yourself?’

‘I han’t nothing to say.’

‘This affected simplicity will not deceive me. Come, what have you to say about the hare?’

‘There he is just as I picked him up,’ and as he spoke John laid the hare on the table.

‘You wish me to believe that you did not steal it, eh?’

‘Steal it? What’s gone? There’s the hare as I picked it up. If I take up this candlestick—so, and lay it down again—so, I han’t stole it, have I?’

‘Do not speak to me in that tone, fellow! I see your drift. You are not so much a fool as a rogue. But your cunning will not avail here. You haven’t farmer Marsh to deal with.’

‘I don’t know anything about drifts. I picked up that dead hare on the road. There

it lies, no better, no wus ; and if it belongs to you, you can keep it.'

'Your insolence shall be punished when you are before the magistrates.'

'Before the magistrates ? You can't bench me for picking up a dead hare.'

'Silence !' cried the enraged baronet, stamping his foot. 'Now, Ledger, let me hear what you have to say. In the first place, how long have you suspected this John Morrison of poaching ?'

'Off and on, about two years,' answered the keeper.

'That's a lie, Jim Ledger !' cried Morrison, aroused from his sullen mood by what seemed to him a vindictive falsehood. He turned upon Ledger fiercely, causing the little villain to retire hastily.

'Silence !' exclaimed Sir Andrew again, striking the table with his fist. 'If you do not behave yourself, you shall not have the chance of exculpating yourself ; I will commit you at once.'

John Morrison looked at Sir Andrew in perplexity. Was it possible that the baronet had the power to send him to gaol for giving the lie to a liar ? he asked himself. The possibility was evident, and cowed him at once.

The baronet turned again to Ledger.

‘You have suspected him for two years. Go on.’

‘Since he took the wood,’ said Ledger, ‘I’ve kept a close eye on him, as you told me to, Sir Andrew.’

‘Yes ; I’m seldom wrong in my judgment. I knew we should find he was not content with one theft. Go on.’

‘This afternoon me and George Lough, going along by the side of Sandy Lane copse, came upon a hare hid under the bracken by the side of the road. Suspecting it was hidden there to be fetched away when the night came, we sat down and watched.’

‘You and Lough together?’

‘No, sir ; I sent Lough on a dozen yards or so farther along the road in case the poacher should try to escape.’

‘I see. Yes.’

‘We waited there until about three-quarters of an hour ago,’ continued Ledger, adroitly slipping on the safe side of George Lough and keeping one eye upon Morrison, ‘when up came this man, John Morrison, treading along the turf. He stops, looks about to see that no one is near, then slips his hand in the brake and pulls out the hare.’

John Morrison started, and, looking at his accuser, his bottom jaw fell. He was completely bewildered by the false charge.

Ledger, edging still a step nearer to the baronet and away from John, continued :

‘ No sooner had he got it than he went off at a smart pace in the direction of his home. I whistled to George Lough, who jumped over the ditch—he being hid in the copse—and stopped him till I came up. We took him with the hare in his hand as we brought him here, Sir Andrew, and that is all.’

‘ You have done your duty admirably, Ledger, and the whole management of this affair reflects great credit upon you. It shall not be forgotten. Now, Morrison, have you anything to urge in your defence ?’

‘ May I speak ?’ asked John, in a faltering voice.

‘ You may, if you do not abuse your privilege. What have you to say ?’

‘ I say that Jim Ledger is a liar, and all he has said a wicked, false lie. I did not walk along the turf. I did not slip my hand in the brake. For why ? The hare lay there in the middle o’ the road. I picked him up as he lay there, and, feeling of him all over, found he was a dead ’ne.’

‘Dead one? What do you mean?’ asked Sir Andrew.

‘A hare as had died o’ the rot, and not been killed.’

Ledger gave a short derisive laugh, and pinched the hare’s skin.

‘Is that the case? Did the hare die naturally, Ledger?’

‘Not he, sir. I never see a hare in finer condition. ‘Sides, Sir Andrew, here’s the mark of the wire on him—collared, as we call it. See, sir. And you can tell by the fall of his head that his neck’s been broke with the side of the hand in the or’nary way.’

John Morrison trembled—a sign of his guilt to Sir Andrew, who was watching him.

‘Have you anything more to say?’ the baronet asked, severely.

‘Why, Sir Andrew, you can’t believe I snared the hare and killed it, when not much more ‘an an hour ago I was up here begging for a loaf and a blanket?’

‘Ah, that’s a clumsy artifice. I see now the reason of your making that impudent request. It was to enable you to get up an *alibi*. That is your line of defence, is it?’

‘I swear it is true that I picked up that hare in the middle of the road, and, believing

it to be a dead 'ne, thought I might take it home to feed my poor children on since you wouldn't give us a loaf.'

'Again a very clumsy subterfuge. Then you admit taking the hare with you?'

'Yes, that be true.'

'That is quite sufficient. I will write to Major Ewens. He will commit you at once. Ledger, get the spring cart. You and Lough shall take this man to Major Ewens, get the order, and go on to Guildford at once.'

The baronet took up a pen, and, as he commenced writing, said to John Morrison:

'On Saturday you will be brought before the bench, and I advise you to relinquish your ill-constructed plan of defence. It will only cause you to be sent to the assizes for trial. Better plead guilty at once, and go to gaol for three months.'

'Go to gaol—three months!' exclaimed Morrison, catching at the table for support.

'You may think yourself fortunate if you get off with that.'

'But I declare I am innocent of wicked intent. I do swear it. Send for master Marsh. He will tell you that I never took——'

'Your master shall not get you off this

time,' said the baronet, still writing. 'I yielded to his wishes before unwisely. You must go to gaol.'

John could find no words to speak. He waited, with a tumult of feelings working in his breast, as Sir Andrew finished writing the order. Ledger had gone to order the cart, and now returned.

'Here is the letter,' said the baronet, turning the paper over and smoothing it on the blotting-paper. 'Take him.'

Lough stepped forward.

Realising his peril, John snatched his arm from the keeper's hand, and with a wild, inarticulate cry, threw himself on his knees at the baronet's feet.

'Oh, Sir Andrew, mercy—mercy on me!' he cried. 'I am innocent. I declare I am. But I will not contradict you if only you will be merciful. Think of it—I have a family of little children, and a poor wife whose time is close at hand. Think of it—it is Christmas-tide; fancy the misery you will bring on them by sending me away—fancy how you may gladden their wretched hearts by sparing me!'

The baronet, impulsively harsh, impulsively lenient, looked down on this ragged, clay-

begrimed, piteous object at his feet, and was melted to compassion.

‘Come on, none o’ that—it won’t do,’ put in Ledger. ‘Fetch him up, Lough. Don’t you see he’s annoying Sir Andrew?’

‘Have mercy on me, Sir Andrew!’ implored John, half sobbing as he thought of Joan and his ragged brood at home. ‘I will work for you, body and soul, day and night, till I can work no more, if only you will pity me. Throw that letter in the fire. Why will you believe Ledger, and not me? He owes me a spite, and has invented this story to ruin me and kill the poor woman who wouldn’t have him for her husband.’

‘You will get no compassion from me by vilifying a man who has ever served me faithfully and well.’

‘I tell you he is a liar!’ cried Morrison, who every moment was losing the ground he had gained, and ruining his only hope.

‘Take him away, Lough. It is cruel to be weak at such a moment. You must go to prison.’

‘You will not send me away? Good God! what will become of my wife and children? They have not a penny in the world.’

‘They shall be cared for, and are likely to

be better off parted from such a man as you. You are not a fit example for children to have before them.'

'Mercy !' screamed Morrison, struggling with the keepers as they laid hands on him.

He had no chance with Lough—a young, well-fed, strong-bodied man—and, still crying for pity, he was carried from the room.



CHAPTER VI.

THE BIRTH OF FOLLY.

WHEN one J.P. writes to another, saying, 'I send you for committal a poacher, taken red-handed by my keepers,' common courtesy obliges the second J.P. to comply without hesitation, unless there exists a personal animosity between the two gentlemen, when, indeed, the case may be different.

Major Ewens was on the best terms of friendship with his neighbour Sir Andrew Aveling, so he wrote the required order, after putting one or two brief and formal questions to the accusing keepers and the accused poacher. And John Morrison was carried over to Guildford, there to be kept in custody for five days, that he might be brought be-

fore the bench of magistrates, who would then determine what further punishment he should receive.

Meanwhile Joan, expecting her husband's return, grew anxious as the evening went on. Several times she went to the door and looked out. He had said nothing of his intention to go and beg at the hall, and she knew nothing to account for his protracted absence. At length a woman, carrying bread and blankets, who had just come from Ave-ling Hall, brought her the news that John Morrison had been sent away in a cart with James Ledger and George Lough for stealing a hare.

'And where ha' they took my man?' asked Joan, a pathetic tremor in her voice.

'They told me he wur going to Guildford.'

'But t' don't think they'll keep 'im there?'

'Aye, till the bench sits next week.'

'What! for nothin' at all?'

'He's stole a hare, I tell ye.'

'I don't believe it, woman; do ye?' exclaimed Joan, fiercely. 'I don't think that my John'd take anything wilful like that didn't belong to him.'

'Nay, to be sure,' answered the woman, in a conciliatory tone. 'But, you see, magis-

trates don't think nothing about the wilfulness of the thing. What are ye going to do, my dear?' she added, as Joan, having looked into the next apartment, locked the door, and took down her shawl and bonnet from the nail on which they hung.

'Going to help my man, for certain I'

'What, at this time o' night—all that way—and you in your condition?'

'Tain't me that's to be thought on now—'tis my John. Come, nei'bour, theren't no time to lose. Thank ye for bringing me the tidings, bad though they be.'

With these words Joan accompanied her visitor to the door, which she locked, and then started on her journey.

Farmer Marsh had helped her before, and with the hope that he would be good to her now, she went over to Mayford, though it was far out of her line of route to Guildford.

Marsh listened with knitted brows to the brief statement of his servant's new misfortune, turned his back to the fire, and thrust his hands in his breeches-pocket. The movement was sufficiently indicative of his determination to stay by his hearth.

'No, Joan; I can do nothing for him,' said

he. 'John's a fool, who can't keep himself out of trouble, and won't be guided. I bade him square it up with Ledger, and told him how it would be if he didn't. He was obstinate, and now he must abide by the consequences. I can't run against my landlord : he's a man that likes to have his own way. I've got a family of my own, and mustn't risk being turned out of my farm by helping a man that my landlord don't like. John must go before the bench ; 'twill make him more careful in the future. And look here, Joan, my good woman, I don't want to be hard with you, and I shan't worry you for rent while you're in trouble, but I advise you to seek out some other place for your John to get into when he comes from prison, for it won't do for me to take him back here.'

Joan, picturing her husband alone in distress, did not wait to parley further with her old master. She left him standing before the blazing kitchen fire, and went out into the night without a word.

Before she had got over a mile of her journey she felt so weak that she had to rest herself a while upon a bank. She was impatient of delay, and started on again in a few minutes. Her knees trembled under her,

and she staggered ascending the hill. On the brow of the hill she was forced to stop again, but her mind was restless still. It vexed her that she was weak and incapable of this easy task. Hundreds of times she had walked to Guildford and back again laden with heavy parcels, feeling no fatigue scarcely except towards the end of the journey, and now when she most needed strength it was denied her.

It seemed as if Providence were against her John and her, and a bitter feeling of resentment frenzied her soul as she thought of the bitter hardships of their life, their long term of patient endurance, and her present impotency.

‘What have we done that we should be made to suffer thus?’ she asked; and, looking up at the cold sky with its watery veil of cloud, she doubted if a merciful God yet reigned in heaven.

Expecting no help from above, she listened for the sound of cart-wheels. A carter might pity her, though Heaven denied. But the night was still and soundless. She rose and walked, determined to rest no more until the town was reached. For another mile she staggered along, blindly at times, her eyes

closed with pain, but indomitable in her perseverance. Then, with a great sigh, she sank upon a heap of stones by the side of the common. She fell into a kind of sleep for a few seconds, from which she awoke with a vague belief that she had slept hours, and, rising all bewildered and giddy, tottered onwards a few yards, not knowing whither, but keeping to the road. She looked about her stupidly, saw a familiar object before her on her left hand which should have been on her right, and went on, striving to explain the mystery.

Suddenly it occurred to her that she had been retracing her steps, and was walking from Guildford instead of towards it.

Then she threw herself upon the earth, grinding her teeth, and tearing up handfuls of the tough heather in futile rage.

As she lay there a spasm of pain shot through her ; it was followed by the drowsy half-consciousness of exhaustion. Her ideas became confused, a numbness seized her senses, she forgot everything.

At midnight a waggoner, coming from Guildford, and on his way to Chertsey, discovered Joan lying across the path, her hands

stretched before her among the heather, her feet in the road.

Had he been a London carman, he would have thought her dead drunk, and left her there to recover when she might ; but this man had seen less of drunkenness than of privation, and, with the assistance of his boy, contrived to lift the unconscious woman into the empty waggon.

In Chertsey he knocked up the porter of the workhouse, and explained matters.

The porter grumbled and demurred.

‘Come, man,’ said ‘the waggoner, ‘don’t make a trouble of what can’t be helped. You must take in the woman ; and bein’ it’s Christmas morning, and the poor soul’s in a bad way and like to be a mother, you may as well do your duty cheerful and kindly.’

With assistance the porter carried Joan into the house, and gave her into the hands of the matron, a motherly body, who, seeing the poor creature’s condition, did all she could for her relief.

Towards daybreak Joan gave birth to a child, and gained a faint degree of consciousness. She recollected John and her children, and knew that she was helpless and in a strange place.

She began to cry childishly.

‘Don’t e cry, my good woman,’ said the matron, patting her shoulder. ‘’Tis all over, and the child is a rare peart little thing.’

‘John, my poor John !’

‘Aye, John, he’s a good man, and your husband lawful, as I see by the ring on your finger.’

‘John, my man—let me go to him.’

‘Nay, lie still, a good soul. You must not move ; you cannot.’

‘My childer all locked up and alone there. My poor John, let me go to him—I’ll be strong—’tis not more than four mile to walk now,’ whimpered Joan.

‘Why, we’ll send for him directly, and you shall all spend Christmas together happy.’

‘All together—John and the childer and all !—all here around me—all their sweet faces !’ exclaimed Joan incredulously, yet with a tender accent of hope.

‘Aye, aye, aye ! The porter shall go. ’Tis six striking now, harkey !’

‘Six, and Christmas morning ?’

‘Aye, don’t ye hear the clock, and all the church bells ringing so cheerful ?’

‘I doan know the bells ; I can’t hear

nothin' but my dear childer crying for me to come and let them from their room.'

'Nay, 'tis your babe here is crying for ye—see!'

'But my John and my other childer!'

'Why, ye shall have all presently.'

Joan lay silently collecting her thoughts a moment, then she threw out her arms, crying:

'Oh, no, no, no! I shall never see 'em again—never, never! My John lies in prison, and my childer starve in the cot, and I am here—no more a wife and mother to love and care for 'em, and cuddle 'em in my arms.'

She sank back in a passionate fit of weeping.

The matron looked at the nurse holding the baby, and shook her head significantly; then she sat down on the side of the bed with a sigh, and patted Joan's shoulder again, as a mother pats her infant to sleep.

The sobs abated, and, after a silence, Joan asked:

'Where am I?'

'In Chertsey, dear.'

'God help me!'

'God will; 'tis His day of pity. Needs

He must pity all who suffer at this time, for memory of His Son.'

'And my John and the little 'nes—will He comfort they?'

'Aye, aye, to be sure.'

'My man alone! my little 'nes all crying for me, and wondering why they be locked up wi'out food or comfort—oh, isn't it sorrowful to think on!'

'For certain sure. But they shall be helped; I'll see to 'em myself when you are strong enough to tell us all about 'em. But restey quiet now, there's a good woman.'

'And you'll tell John the moment ye see him how his Joan tried her most to come to him; and ye'll tell the childer that they shall ha' a big pudden wi' plums and curran's and things in soon's ever mammy gets a bit strong?'

'That I will.'

Joan sighed, and a faint smile relaxed her pinched cheeks.

'Gi' me my wee child,' she said, presently.

'There it is; and a fine little girl it be, too, and like you as may be, even to the little mole in the corner of the eye, looky.'

The mother took her child, and, forgetting

all but her maternity for the moment, grew ineffably sweet to look upon.

‘John wished it to be called Florence if it were born a girl,’ said she, looking up from the mite at her bosom.

‘Florence—’tis a sweet name!’ said the matron.

‘Florence—my poor man—my John!’ murmured Joan, faintly, as she closed her eyes.

She never opened them again, for God *did* pity her.



CHAPTER VII.

A HANDFUL OF CHIPS DROPPED INTO THE OCEAN.

JOHAN MORRISON in Guildford lock-up awaiting his trial for stealing a dead hare; eleven of his children without fire, food, or friends in a cottage near Woking; Joan Morrison lying stark dead in the parish mortuary of Chertsey; her newly-born infant in the workhouse hard by crying lustily over the first troubles of her existence—this was the position of these *dramatis personæ* at that time of general feasting and merriment the morning of Christmas Day, 1853.

Towards noon the famished children in Sandy Lane, getting no response from father or mother to their piteous cries, were prompted by necessity to act for themselves. The two

eldest girls (twins) got through the window of the room in which they were confined—it was upon the ground-floor—and lifted out the younger ones. Then these eleven hapless youngsters, ragged and half clad, their noses purple with cold, their unwashed cheeks besmirched with tears, went in a body over the frozen fields to Mayford, seeking their father.

Farmer Marsh received them charitably, and with all the kindness his rough, brusque nature could exhibit. He set them round the great fire burning on the kitchen hearth, before which the goose was cooking, and gave them bread and cheese and ale; then he sent them off in a tumbrel, well filled with straw litter, under the charge of his carter, to Guildford workhouse.

With this act of benevolence farmer Marsh leaves these pages: neither he nor these children have any further history here.

The following week John Morrison was brought before the bench of magistrates. In the interval he had learnt that his wife had deserted her children, and was nowhere to be found, and that his children had been sent to the workhouse. His inability to seek Joan, whom he knew nothing but accident or death could separate from her brood,

maddened him. He was not in his sound senses when he was brought before the magistrates, and persisted in declaring that Sir Andrew Aveling and his keeper had conspired to ruin him. His violence in protesting his innocence was attributed to artifice rather than a consciousness of innocence, and his offence obtained no extenuation from the generous appeal of the offended baronet. Sir Andrew's weak and lenient character was well known; and his friends the magistrates, in his defence and their own, determined to put a summary check upon the violence and depredations of John Morrison. All they would do in the way of mercy was to give him the option of going for trial to the assizes or receiving an immediate sentence.

Naturally enough, John Morrison chose to know his fate at once. Thereupon he was sentenced to three months' imprisonment, and complimented on his good fortune in getting off so lightly.

In gaol he made the acquaintance of a man who had been there before. This new friend gave him some good worldly advice which sank deep into his receptive mind. 'Look after yourself' was the motto he was told to keep constantly before him.

‘Since the parish is so fond of your brats, let them keep ’em till you want ’em,’ said this new friend ; ‘and if you must find your wife, go about it with a clean pair of heels. You won’t travel far with a dozen children tied to ’em !’

John Morrison came out of gaol an altered man, but still cherishing an affection for his lost Joan. Wherever he fancied he might hear of her he asked for news, despite the short answers and rude rebuffs he got from those he had once known as his equals. He learnt that on Christmas Eve Joan had left her cottage with the determination of going to him in Guildford, and that early the following morning a carter had picked up a dying woman and carried her away. More than this he was unable to discover, and so, when further search was hopeless, he walked away from that part of the country and entered London.

In the Brompton Road he came to a mews. A waggon loaded with hay stood there. Beside the carter stood the stable-keeper, with his hands in his breeches-pockets and a straw in his mouth. He was disinclined for work, and the carter wanted assistance to unload the hay. Seeing John Morrison with

care and anxiety written on his face he hailed him.

‘Here, you—want a job?’

‘Aye, master.’

‘Then just lend a hand with this hay.’

The energy with which John Morrison set to work, and his dexterity in moving the hay, won the admiration of the lazy man, chewing his straw and turning over the silver in his pocket.

‘You seem a smart sort of a hand,’ said he, looking at John as he put on his jacket and wiped the perspiration from his forehead.

‘Out of work?’

‘Yes, master. Just walked up from away there in Surrey. Times are hard.’

‘Understand horses?’

‘Aye, I’ve had to do wi’ ’em every day o’ my life since I wur a little chap no higher ’an so.’

‘Cut chaff?’

‘Ten truss a day wi’ a single cutter.’

‘Make yourself useful—clean up—do what you’re told—no grumbling?’

‘I can turn my hand to a’most everything, and so’s I get my wages paid I must do my work and be pleasant.’

‘What wages do you want?’

‘I have been a-gettin’ a matter of fourteen shillings, but——’

‘Want to better yourself. I know. Well, I like the look of you, so I’ll give you sixteen and try you. I don’t want to know why you left your last berth, and if I did I bet you wouldn’t tell me. You can begin now ; but mark me, if I catch you pilfering at the oats, or getting drunk when there’s a job on, off you go at a moment’s notice. That’s my form.’

John Morrison would have accepted service at half the wages offered, for he had now no one but himself to provide for, and the generosity of his new employer surprised him as much as his warning with regard to honesty and sobriety. He had never tasted the liquor he could get drunk upon.

He began work at once and earned his money easily—too easily, for the day’s labours were ended early and spare time hung heavily upon him. He could not read, and for men of his kind there are no amusements. What *could* he do in his leisure hours but think of his poor Joan and his lost children ? To do some extra job, such as scouring bright a rusty horse-bit, repairing a manger, or the like, was a pleasure to him—it occupied his

thoughts; but when his stables were all clean, and no work of any kind presented itself, he would sit on a truss of straw or a corn-bin in the dark, thinking of the hard times that were past, yet wishing them back for the sake of seeing the faces he had tried to make happy. It was a melancholy business working for himself alone, fair as it had appeared set forth by his gaol friend. He was not conditioned to enjoy a selfish existence. He yearned after his youngsters, but the fear of being imprisoned for not taking them out of the workhouse when he left gaol deterred him from fetching them away. He knew his amenities in this respect.

His habit of sitting alone in the dark when he could find no work to do was discovered by his fellow-workers in the yard, and they set him down for a dull, unsociable clod. None of them liked him—he worked too well.

They told the ‘governor,’ and he, mindful of his oats, dropped into the stable one night when it was all dark and quiet, and by the light of the lantern he carried perceived John Morrison sitting on a truss of clover.

‘Halloa, my man, what are you doing here?’ he asked.

‘Waiting till it be time to gi’ the nags their supper, and go to bed, master.’

‘But why are you sitting here in the dark?’

‘I got nothin’ to do and nowheres else to go till bed-time: as for the dark, that’s nowt to me. It’s all one when you’ve only got to think.’

‘Think! What have you to think about?’

‘On’y troubles, master; on’y troubles.’

‘Why, what troubles can you have?’

‘No worse ’an other people’s, maybe, but they’re more ’an enough for me. I ha’ lost my wife, and my little ’nes, and my home and all. All’s gone, and there’s nowt left of ’em to me but the mem’ry,’ answered John; and repeated in a lower voice, as if to himself, ‘Wife and home and little ’nes—all gone!’

The stable-keeper was a vulgar man—a horsey, knowing man, of crooked dealings and slight credit; but he had a wife and children of his own that he liked better than his horses or his bull pup, and a fellow-feeling made his heart turn kindly towards his lonely stable-help sitting there alone in the dark dwelling with the shadows of a happier time.

‘Here, you come along o’ me, Jack,’ said he, blowing out the light. ‘This isn’t the

place for a sorrowful man. We shall have you hanging yourself or something. Be a man, and forget your troubles ; don't nuss 'em up like a woman. Come along o' me.'

John Morrison obeyed instinctively, and followed his master, who trotted off across the stable-yard with that jerky movement habitual to men who tread cobble-stones frequently.

Up the mews, along the Brompton Road, and down a turning that owed its illumination to a flaring gin-shop at the end, went master and man. The door of the house swung open freely to the stable-keeper's hand, as though it were used to his touch. From the bar a side-door opened into a tap-room, where there was a bright fire burning and plenty of company seated about. They entered.

'Bring two hot gins and a screw of tobacco,' said the stable-keeper to the potman. Then he nodded to the assembled company, took up a couple of clay pipes, and, giving one to John Morrison, sat down with the other beside a jolly-looking old man with a mulberry nose, who greeted him with a respectful yet friendly touch of the hat.

'Come to spend a hour with us, gov'nor?' asked the cheerful man.

‘Can’t stay long to-night, Charley; but I’ve brought my man, Jack, here—as good a fellow as any that ever worked for me, but a bit low in spirits. Now I want you to take him in hand and cheer him up a bit,’ answered the stable-keeper, adding in a lower tone, ‘I’ll make it all right. Lost his missus—stranger here—make him comfortable—I’ll put it all right with you.’

The old fellow nodded and winked, looking at John Morrison, who was handling his pipe sheepishly.

The grog came, and with it the tobacco.

‘Fill your pipe, Jack,’ said the master.

The man obeyed.

‘Now drink that noggin, and when you’ve done that you’ll take another with old Charley.’

‘That’s all right,’ said old Charley. ‘You leave us together; me and him’s going to be reg’lar pals, and have a good night of it.’

* * * * *

In this way John Morrison was taken from his sorrow and weaned—upon gin-and-water.

In the public-house he found what he could find nowhere else in London—comfort and forgetfulness in his spare time; and now that this source of consolation was opened to him

he turned eagerly to it whenever his own misfortunes depressed him. The tap-room became his home, and the company in it took the place of wife and children. To solace himself there was the most rational thing he could do in the absence of any healthier or better means of relief; and so he, with many thousands of the neglected and uncared-for, floated into the vortex, to be hurried along and whirled down with ever-increasing swiftness and sureness to destruction.

Who is to blame? We are not uncharitable. We pay our church-rates, and subscribe to charities and missions that these souls may be saved; but our paid moralist stands on the safe ground afar off, issuing warnings in a feeble voice which is not heard. His hand is delicate, and his arm as weak as his head: altogether he is not the man to fling out a rough rope and drag up strugglers from a vortex. Our money is ill-spent, and in parting with it foolishly we are fools, for which we alone are to blame.

We leave John Morrison just within the influence of this huge whirlpool. We shall see him again when he is further down.

* * * * *

Chertsey troubled itself but little about

Joan Morrison. Her name was not known ; the porter who took her in failed to take the address of the carter who brought her to the house ; the surrounding parishes repudiated her, and it was deemed cheaper to bury her and forget her than to go to the expense of inquiry, which might, after all, lead only to profitless litigation. So there in Chertsey Joan was buried.

Her child was reared under the charge of the matron, and from her received the name her mother had desired her to have—Florence.

For a workhouse-born child this gentle name was as inappropriate as might well be, and it changed in obedience to that law of 'fitness' which governs nomenclature, first to its diminutive Florry, and then, by an easy transition, to Folly. This name slipped easily over the tongue, and was retained ; and certainly it must be admitted that a more suitable one could not have been devised for the child whose very existence was a sarcasm upon the utilitarian spirit of the workhouse in which she lived.

* * * * *

Thusthis family was broken up and scattered like a handful of chips dropped into the ocean.



CHAPTER VIII.

FOLLY'S FIRST CONQUEST.

IN 1856 there lived at Chertsey a retired dancer and his wife, named Fernandez.

Tom Fernandez and Marie la Rose danced harlequin and columbine at Drury Lane in the palmy days of pantomime, when Jo Grimaldi was clown there. La Rose was a good little woman as well as a good dancer ; and at the end of one pantomime season Tom Fernandez married her, having the great Jo Grimaldi for his best man, an honour which he talked of to his dying day.

Harlequin and columbine were as happy married as they had been single ; but contentment, which makes a man stout, and is

seemly enough in an alderman, is a serious disadvantage to a harlequin. Every year Tom found it more difficult to slip his bat under his belt, and it became evident that before long he would get a word of advice from the gallery which would necessitate a farewell performance.

Fernandez had always been a lucky man, and just at that time, when his corpulence was endangering his popularity as a dancer, he was prompted to risk a few pounds in a foreign lottery, and had the good fortune to win the first prize of £5,000. Having invested the money, he had the good sense to retire with his wife to the suburban cottage where he now lived, upon the interest of his capital, with such little additions as he made by arranging ballets occasionally.

They had no children, which was a matter of great regret to Tom, who, like most comedians, was devotedly fond of children. To supply their place, he kept a perfect menagerie of domestic and other animals. They, however, failed to supply the want of his fatherly heart; and whenever he could get a child to come and spend the day in his house he did, exerting himself to the utmost to make the little one happy.

The most frequent of these little visitors was Tom's niece, a child whom he liked simply because she was a child, and from no feeling of kindred. There was no sympathy between the brothers, and their wives hated each other cordially. The ladies were jealous of each other, one being a mother, the other wife to an independent and retired harlequin.

Instigated by their wives, the brothers would have quarrelled undoubtedly, but for Tom's fear of losing his niece and his brother's dread of losing the inheritance of Tom's money. However, the wives at length met, and such a quarrel ensued between them that their husbands could no longer remain neutral: their mutual forbearance gave way, and they parted each with an assertion of his independence. After that Tom could no longer invite his niece.

Having deprived her husband of a pleasure, Marie felt bound to offer a substitute, especially as he showed signs of a desire to extend the olive-branch to his brother; and it was she who first proposed that they should adopt a child as their own, a scheme which recommended itself to her as a means of blighting her sister-in-law's prospects with regard to the inheritance of Tom's money.

Tom made no objection to the proposal : it was more than agreeable to him. The only difficulty he suggested was that of finding a suitable child.

‘We should be able to find one in the—the workhouse,’ said Marie, with some hesitation.

Her husband made a wry face at the name of the institution.

‘I do not mean a grown child,’ said his wife, ‘but a little thing that has no parents, and is too young to have learnt anything unpleasant from the people there ; a nice little creature that you might bring up in your own way, as if it were your own child.’

‘That would be pleasant enough ; but are we likely to find such a child ?’

‘We can but try. If we fail it’s no matter. I know the matron there, and if I recollect rightly she said something about having just such a child as we are speaking about.’

‘Well, we can but try, as you say. But we’ll have a good talk over it first, for it’s rather a responsible affair taking a child for good and all, and Sam will be awfully put out. However, we’ll talk about it.’

Mrs. Fernandez wanted nothing better ; for what woman would despair when the

object she wishes to obtain depends upon her ability to talk her husband into compliance ?

The following afternoon Mr. Fernandez and his wife called upon Mrs. Barlow, the matron of the workhouse, and were shown into her private apartment. A little child with a golden head stood against the wall, gravely tracing out the pattern on the paper with a soft pink finger.

Hearing voices behind her, as Marie went through the ceremony of introducing her husband to the matron, the child turned her head and looked with her large, widely-opened dark eyes at the strangers, her little mouth open, and her finger raised as she had taken it from the wall. Turning her body to face the new object of interest, her feet slipped and she fell. Sitting where she had fallen, her astonishment melted into mirth, and with a little crow she cried :

‘ Folly fall down.’

‘ Yes, Folly fell down. Did Folly hurt herself ?’ said the matron.

‘ No, Folly not hurt self. Folly all lite. Folly dit up adain now.’ Therewith Folly turned herself over on all fours and raised herself to her feet. ‘ ‘Ere, Folly all lite,’ she cried, laughing. Then, looking at the

strangers, she suddenly became aware of the gravity of the occasion, staring at the stout gentleman in solemn wonder, and raising her finger to the little round bud of her mouth in grave silence.

It was not less amusing to look at Mr. Fernandez, who was returning the child's gaze with equal intensity.

'Will you take a seat, sir?' asked the matron.

Tom did not answer. He was introducing himself to Folly now with 'nods and becks and wreathed smiles,' which led to his crossing the room and going down on his knees to shake hands with her.

'My husband is so fond of children,' exclaimed Marie, in extenuation of Tom's proceedings; and then she opened the subject on which they had come to consult Mrs. Barlow.

Meanwhile Tom and Folly were getting on capitally together, making a pie in the new Sunday hat which Marie had induced her husband to wear for the occasion. A tin rattle, a wooden horse, a wet mug, and a doll that had suffered amputation and bled sawdust copiously, were all stuffed into the elegant beaver and patted down with Folly's

fat little hand. When nothing more could be crammed in everything was turned out, and the hat being turned on one side formed an admirable stable for the horse, where, according to Folly's notion of propriety, the noble animal was put to bed on some sawdust, covered over with a handkerchief, and provided with the tin rattle, 'tase he wakes up and wants tumting to p'ay wiv.' After that the hat was turned up to serve for a carriage, and the limp doll, with the horse for a companion, and the rattle, mug, and other travelling requisites at its side, was taken for a ride round the legs of the table. It was delightful fun. There never was such a useful hat as that, and never, when these games were concluded, a more disreputable one to look at.

By that time Mrs. Fernandez had described to her friend in a confidential undertone all the particulars of her quarrel with Mrs. Sam Fernandez, and her reasons for wishing her husband to adopt a child.

'Why, bless me!' said the matron, 'there's the very child you want—Folly, the healthiest, best little thing that ever lived.'

'You don't mean to say I can have this little dear?' said Mrs. Fernandez, in surprise.

‘Why, to be sure, I shall be sorry to part with her, but it is for her good, as she’s just of an age to take notice, and the other children she would be associated with could do her no good. I’ve had her under my care from the very day she was born, three years this next Christmas, and I assure you her mother seemed a wholesome clean woman, with a proper ring on her finger worn quite thin. The mother died on the day Folly was born.’

Tom had taken a seat like a rational being, and listened eagerly to this history, keeping his eyes the time on Folly, who, seated upon his knee, had returned to her serious mood, and was going over the buttons on his capacious waistcoat with her finger solemnly.

‘I never dreamt I could have such a sweet little child as that. I thought it was your own, ma’am,’ said he.

The matron was pleased with the compliment, and assured him that there would be no difficulty in adopting the little girl. Then she explained the forms that would have to be used, and told at great length all she knew about Folly.

Folly’s finger wearied in its travels. She rested her round cheek against the soft seal-

skin of Tom Fernandez's waistcoat, and her mouth opened in a long yawn.

She took her fingers from the buttons, and, doubling her fist, rubbed it into her eyes viciously. Then with another yawn she returned to the buttons, as if going over them again was a serious duty that must not be neglected.

The dark long lashes of her eyes fell lower upon her creamy skin, her hand lost its power and slid down into her lap, the closed lips parted, just showing her small white teeth. She nestled down closer in the soft waistcoat. Her hair, cut short, according to the workhouse regulations, spread around her head in soft golden-red curls like a glory. Her breath came and went at longer intervals. Folly slept.

'Hush!' whispered the old pantomimist, raising the finger of his disengaged hand, while with the other he clasped the little one closer to his kind heart, and gently like a woman.

Then the three looked down in silent admiration on the beautiful picture presented by this sleeping child.

A beautiful picture, indeed, for a silly old man and a couple of women to dote on—a

charming toy to amuse them. But is that all? Shall she be no more than a toy, to be loved while her beauty lasts, cherished while she can amuse, to be cast aside as worthless when the bright cheek fades and the merry spirit grows dull?

If so, nature has but poorly compensated her for poverty and helplessness by giving her health and beauty, and would have dealt more kindly by her in being less generous. It were better for Folly to die young, or grow up with a homely face, than to live and perish a toy.

A sleeping child—a cloudlet in the morning sky, flushed with the tenderest morning tints, are they not alike? Both freshly sprung from the bosom of nature. Who can look at either without thinking of its destiny?

The cloud grows, collecting fire or dew, and anon it bursts upon the world, blasting mankind in its fierce irruption, or it falls in gentle showers, refreshing and invigorating the earth—God's instrument of love or wrath.

And Folly?



CHAPTER IX.

THE TWIG IS BENT.

FOM FERNANDEZ obtained permission to adopt Folly as his child with but little opposition from the board of guardians. One overseer only—deacon of a Dissenting chapel, and grocer—objected, basing his protest on the ground that Mr. Fernandez had been a play-actor, and was, therefore, an improper person to be entrusted with the bringing up of a child. But this objection was ably met by another overseer, also a guardian, and one having the advantage of knowing Mr. Fernandez as a ready-money customer, who argued, first, that Mr. Fernandez was not a legitimate play-actor, but a harlequin; and, secondly, that though he had once been a har-

lequin, he must clearly have been a very bad harlequin to have retired from his profession so early, and consequently he could claim to be considered a respectable member of society. He concluded by asking the board to look at the applicant, and doubt, if they could, his entire fitness to undertake the responsibilities of a father.

Certainly Tom's appearance justified all that could be said against him as a dancer, or urged in his favour as a benevolent and sober man. The portly, respectably dressed old gentleman might have been an alderman if looks were the only necessary qualification for that high office.

So the requisite forms were filled up and signed, and Folly was handed over to the harlequin.

Folly's life in her new home was one of perpetual indulgence. The old dancer worshipped her, and, watching her inclinations, gratified her wishes, when it was possible, before they were expressed. She did no wrong thing that he could not excuse; he never rebuked her, and would permit no one else to do so. People—his wife included—said he spoilt the child; but he could see no foundation for this accusation, since she was

all he wished her to be. She was beautiful, and loved him intensely. What more could he desire ?

He dressed her like a little princess, and took her about to be admired. It was impossible to see and not admire her—a handsome, long-limbed, fearless child, dressed with all the taste her foster-mother—originally a Parisian *modiste*—could bestow on her. It was impossible also for parents of plainer children to see her without detecting her faults, and thanking Providence that *their* offspring were not so self-willed, so vain, so impudent as she.

The old man never attempted to conceal his admiration from the child ; on the contrary, he taught her to believe herself a prodigy. Folly was an apt pupil.

He encouraged her with praise in every attempt she made to fascinate—for in her eighth year the child was a perfect coquette—and flattered her when she succeeded.

The result of this corruptive training may be imagined. Folly grew up self-willed, indolent, affected, and preposterously vain. Her intense love of admiration, fostered by the flattery of her weak-headed old guardian, made her entirely different to other children

of her age. Their practices she purposely avoided, and in that way endeavoured to make herself conspicuous successfully. She would have nothing to do with dolls after she came to the discreet age of six ; she took no notice of toys ; and even sweetmeats she pretended to dislike. To be sent into a nursery to play with children was the greatest punishment that could be inflicted on her ; and while they would be romping about half mad with excitement, she would sit as prim as a governess, thinking the most spiteful things to say if she should be asked to join in the sport. But to go among strange 'grown-up' people, to deport herself with all the assurance of an accomplished flirt, to exercise her powers of fascination, to say a smart thing while other children were sitting mumchance in a corner with their fingers in their mouths, that was her delight.

The only adult occupation she could not bring herself to like was reading. She had a heathenish hatred of letters, which not even her desire to be a lady could overcome. There was no school board in those days, and in the whole seven years of her residence with her foster-father she never learnt to shape a pothook or a hanger. Old Tom was

an easy-going mentor at all times ; but when a tear sparkled on the long lash of his little darling, after she had thrice mistaken the letter B for its neighbour C, to his great amusement, he took her in his arms and pitched the book into the fire, crying :

‘There goes the nasty old book, my pretty, and you shall be troubled never again with the stupid letters. Don’t you cry, ducky. It was unkind of me to laugh, but I never meant to hurt my little Folly. We won’t have any more books till you’re quite a big girl—plenty of time, plenty of time—and not then if you don’t choose to learn, pretty. I don’t see what’s the use of so much learning, except you’ve got a speaking part : I never wanted it in my life. I can sign my name, and that’s just enough for clever people like you and me. Let stupid people learn to spell : we can read without books, and know quite as much as is good for us, hey, Folly ? Now let us go and look after the young rabbits.’

Folly could dance like a sylph. Long before she attempted to read the alphabet she had learnt to pirouette. Dancing, especially such dancing as the old harlequin and columbine taught, was an exercise for which

the child was exceptionally well qualified, for in addition to her desire to do what other children could not do and to excite admiration, she had excellent lungs and the nimblest pair of legs.

Very soon after leaving the workhouse she had been taken to the theatre, where she was merely bewildered by the exhibition she was then unable to understand; but the old dancer took her again and again, watching with delight her growing taste for that profession which an old actor never ceases to love. In time the stage became Folly's fairy-land, and in her imagination the brightest, happiest being on earth was the beautifully dressed *danseuse*, who lived in coloured light amidst enchanting scenery, and whose movements elicited the admiration and applause of the assembled spectators. That was a creature to emulate, and her condition worthy to be aspired to. The possibility of becoming herself a public dancer was an idea which intoxicated the child, and she gave heart and soul to accomplishing the feats she saw performed by the *coryphées*. She succeeded in a way that surprised even those who knew her strong imitative faculty and powers of observation. After seeing an extravaganza

or pantomime, she would the next day go through the whole performance of the actress she had most admired, mimicking every gesture and movement faultlessly.

The old dancers were delighted, and taught her all she had not acquired intuitively. Old Tom arranged and invented burlettas for her to dance in with him, and his wife made costumes for her to wear. Almost any day the old fellow might be seen in his shirt-sleeves—for he exerted himself prodigiously, and that was the style of costume he preferred—whistling or humming dance tunes and capering about grotesquely enough, while Folly, like a natural sylph, moved lightly and gracefully as a gazelle around him.

But she was not satisfied unless she had an audience to dance to, and if Marie was engaged in household affairs she would have half-a-dozen pets from the menagerie in the back garden penned up under chairs along one side of the room—rabbits, guinea-pigs, squirrels, the jackdaw, a cat, a dog, anything would do to smile at and play to. She would play until old Tom was fairly exhausted ; then she would dance alone. She never tired. Solitude was not painful to her as to other children ; rather she liked being

alone at times. Then she would have the mirror from the dressing-table on the floor, setting it so that she could see herself, and having adorned herself with any old coloured ribbons or bits of finery she could get at, she would invent fresh effects, smiling at herself the while with the utmost satisfaction.

Showy, precocious children are seldom agreeable. Those who knew Folly superficially thought they knew the best part of her, and wished to know no more; but they were wrong. To know her thoroughly was to love her entirely. It was easy to forgive her faults, knowing the sweet disposition that underlay them. Her virtues were inbred, her vices merely the result of the peculiar influences to which she was exposed. It may seem out of place to speak here of these matters, but indeed the vices and virtues of a child are as plain to see as those marks on the sapling by which a gardener knows whether the tree will be worthless or good.

Vain, impudent, self-willed, contemptuous as Folly was, she had by no means an unamiable disposition; on the contrary, her heart was excessively tender and warm. But hers was an essentially responsive nature. She did not love spontaneously. She did

not attach herself impulsively to people—forming and breaking attachments in a child-like manner ; but those she knew and trusted she loved with a deep, clinging affection.

No one on earth was more dear to her than her foster-father ; in her eyes he was perfect ; nothing he said or did was wrong ; she never opposed his wishes in the slightest particular. Next to him she loved her foster-mother ; for Marie was only less kind and indulgent to the child than her husband. It was impossible for her to love Folly as he did, for she was more matter-of-fact and perhaps wiser than he ; and besides that, she could not at times entirely repress a feeling of jealousy towards the child, not her own, upon whom her husband bestowed, as it seemed, all his affection.

An old woman and a lame child were Folly's next favourites ; after them came her cats and kittens, puppies, rabbits, and the rest of the live stock which old Tom kept in the house and outbuildings.

For nine years Folly lived in almost uninterrupted happiness, petted, praised, and cherished with even more than parental fondness ; and then, in 1865, the calamity occurred which deprived her of home and

friends, and drove her out to seek subsistence by her own unaided efforts.

Tom Fernandez was superstitious. Ever since he had been in possession of money to dispose of he had entertained the strange presentiment that he should never live to make a will. Influenced by this idea, he put off the duty from time to time with a vague notion that while he refrained from doing it his life was safe. The only person to whom he confessed his apprehension was Marie, who, equally superstitious with himself, dreaded the undertaking as much as he.

However, the fact that if he died intestate Folly would be unprovided for at length overcame Tom's scruples—as the fear of a greater evil makes one accept the less ; and his wife, calling to mind the equally cogent consideration that if Tom died without a will the larger part of his money would be claimed by his brother Sam (thereby benefiting indirectly Sam's wife, whom Marie had never ceased to hate), was induced, after a little struggle with her feelings, to acquiesce in her husband's proposal.

Tom determined to execute his design on the first day of the new year, and wrote to a

solicitor in London making an appointment for that day.

He had never before been to town without taking Folly ; but not even her desire would induce him to take her on this day. The nearer the time approached the more positively he felt that his presentiment was to be fulfilled. The same reason which actuated him in refusing to take Folly determined Marie on accompanying her husband.

‘Whatever comes to my Tom shall come to me,’ said the good wife.

He nursed Folly all the time he was having breakfast. When he bade her good-bye his voice was tremulous and his cheek pale—he came back to the gate to give her another kiss. All this Folly remembered in later times, though it did not affect her then. She was singing at the top of her voice five minutes after he left her to join Marie.

She never saw him again.

About midday the station-master called. The maid-servant opened the door. Folly, in a short muslin dress, with a tinsel crown on her head, was peeping down over the stair balusters.

‘Is Mr. Fernandez at home?’ asked the station-master.

‘No, sir; him and missus is gone to London,’ answered the servant.

‘Did they go by the 9.40 train?’

‘Yes, sir.’

‘Ah, I was afraid so. I thought I saw them.’ He paused, considering. Folly, listening, felt her heart beat quickly, she scarcely knew why. Presently the station-master said:

‘Is any relative of Mr. Fernandez living in this house?’

‘Only the young lady, sir, Miss Folly.’

‘No gentleman—no grown-up person?’

‘No, sir.’

‘Can you tell me where I can find some one of that kind, for I suppose he has relatives?’

‘No, sir: preaps Miss Folly can.’

‘Miss Folly? That is the young child with the beautiful face?’

‘Yes, sir.’

‘Ah, she must not know. The fact is’—here the station-master dropped his voice—‘the fact is, there has been an accident on the line.’

‘An accident?’ screamed Folly, flying

down the stairs in her bits of finery ; ‘an accident? Oh, where is papa? I must go to him, Papa, papa!’

‘My dear child, don’t be alarmed. He may be quite well and safe, only some are killed—that is, injured—and it is quite possible he escaped.’

‘Wherever he is I must go to him!’ cried the child, starting forward.

The station-master took her arm, holding her while he tried to assure her of her foster-father’s safety ; but Folly was half frantic.

‘Let me go,—I must find him. I know the station. I will run along the line. Oh, do let me go! Do, do take me to him!’ she cried, sobbing convulsively, and shivering as though in an ague.

‘Put on your hat, my dear child, and be a calm, reasonable little girl, and you shall come with me, and we will bring papa home quite safe.’

But the old dancer and his little Folly were never more to meet, for he, with his wife, lay under a carriage, crushed almost beyond recognition.



CHAPTER X.

THE RISING OF THE CURTAIN.

This is Boxing Night, December 26th, 1868, half-past six in the evening. The approaches to The Garden Theatre are blocked with cabs and carriages, with here a coal-van and there a brewer's dray. The police, not yet accustomed to the increased traffic, feel it incumbent on them to regulate it in some sort by backing everything drawn by a horse, frantically. The carman of the coal-van, after waiting patiently in the middle of the road half an hour, loses his equanimity, and tries to turn round—nothing in the shape of a cab can hurt his vehicle. He succeeds in getting fairly across the road, and then gives up the attempt in despair. The police back the dray

until it is safely locked in the wheels of a brougham and two hansoms, and leave it so. The drayman goes to sleep. Passengers, anxious to get on, scream at the drivers, who are too deeply engaged in cursing each other to take any notice of these feeble and useless remonstrances. Ladies cry with terror as the back panels crash against the pole of the brougham behind them. The hoarse cries of raven-throated men with playbills, and the shrill nasal call of Irish girls with oranges, are added to the confusion of tongues. The whole *mêlée* is lit up by the light of the brilliant gas jets forming the legend which runs along the façade of the theatre, 'JACK AND THE BEANSTALK.'

In the piazza the throng about the pit entrance is still pushing, struggling, and screaming. Through the open doors the foot-passengers throng into the vestibule. Every now and then a vehicle, more fortunate than the rest, comes up rattling over the stones to the doors, and stops; the window is let down with a rattle and a bang, the door jerked open, and the youngsters allowed to escape from the prison in which for the last half-hour they have endured the misery of expecting to arrive too late for the panto-

mime ; then the door is banged to, and the carriage crawls off while another dashes up.

The excitement here is not less than that in the open streets. Even the officials about the place have lost their heads. They hurry about purposelessly, they give contradictory directions to the inquiring public, and find fault angrily with everyone. It is a very bad quarter of an hour.

In this unlucky time Folly came into the street.

For five minutes she stood looking vaguely at the gas illumination from the opposite side of the way.

It was nearly three years since she had been in such a crowd—the first time in her life she had ever been in it alone. She was bewildered.

But for the pressing necessity that beset her she would have crept away to some quiet place where she might collect her thoughts and grow calm.

A boy stood near her with his hands in his pockets and a basket on his head, surveying the confusion with the calmness of an old general in a battle.

‘Is that a theatre?’ asked Folly, approaching him.

‘ A the-a-tre ! I should think so—that’s The Garden. “ Jack an’ a Beanstalk.” Can’t you read ?’

‘ No.’

‘ Well, that’s what’s on, an’ I on’y wish I was up in the gallery. ’Arry Payne’s clown. You come ’long o’ me, and I’ll show you the door what he goes in at.’

With these words the boy took the basket from his head, and going at the pack of carriages, began to worm his way through the complicated mass with the ease of a snake going through a thicket.

Folly followed, and in some manner got across the road, by which time her guide had forgotten all about her, and was standing, with his hands in his pockets and his basket on his head, watching the muffled artists as they entered the mysterious, fascinating stage-door.

Folly did not need him ; business, not pleasure, occupied her thoughts. Following the stream of people, she came into the piazza.

A queer, strange figure she presented in contrast with other children there. A childish woman, or an overgrown child, this girl of fifteen, dressed in a faded, thin print

dress, starched and ironed into stiff, rigid folds, that came down not so low but that her black cotton stockings might be seen above the broken side-spring boots upon her feet ; her shoulders covered with an absurdly small jacket that displayed plenty of stiff-starched print sleeve. She wore a pair of cotton gloves, and on her head a small straw hat with a feather in it.

Seeing the beautifully-dressed children descending from the carriages to enter the vestibule, she hesitated. A girl of about her own age passed in a slight but beautiful lace mantilla, which she wore tight to her shoulders. Folly drew her own wretched little cloak close across her chest to be in the fashion. The act was an index to her character.

What passed through the child's mind at that moment ? Was it a sorrowful remembrance of the time when she had been as well dressed, as kindly cared for, as the happiest child she saw now ? No ! It was a wild, exultant feeling of superiority to all about her—a mad, defiant idea that she would, in spite of everyone, realise her dreams. She would admire—envy none. She had come here to London to be admired and

envied ; and these people, so anxious to see the most beautiful spectacle the stage presented, should one day block the streets with their carriages, and struggle for admission to the theatre in eagerness to see her.

The immediate question to be solved was, to whom should she apply for an engagement ? As she stood in the footway looking through the doors for one whom she might address on the important subject, she got hustled and pushed about by the people entering the theatre, and her odd little hat with its feather was tilted first over her eyes, then over one ear, then over the other ; it was most annoying at this time, when she wished to look her best. A policeman caught sight of her arranging her hat and standing in the way of better-dressed people. He came up briskly, and, taking her by the shoulder, pushed her along, saying :

‘ Now then, what’s your game here ? Out you go ! ’

Before Folly could utter a word of remonstrance she found herself out of the piazza and among the hurrying cabs.

She waited some time, frightened and perplexed, until the excitement outside subsided, and the dreaded policeman disappeared ; then

she crossed over to the piazza again and looked into the vestibule. A fine gentleman with a long moustache and evening dress was talking with the old man who sat in the pay-place, looking up through the pigeon-hole. It seemed to her that he might be the manager. The policeman was still distant. Presently the gentleman moved from the pay-place and stood before the fire with his hands behind him.

With a thumping heart Folly pushed open the door, and then with a quick, nervous step approached the gentleman.

‘If you please, sir, are you the master of this theatre?’ she asked.

The gentleman, who was acting manager, and entertained a high opinion of his own importance, nodded assent.

‘If you please, sir, I want to dance in your theatre.’

The *naïveté* of the child was so amusing, and her face so pretty, that the acting manager felt inclined to enter into the subject; but, raising his eyes at that moment to a mirror opposite, he caught sight of his own faultless figure in juxtaposition with a girl in broken boots, a starched cotton frock, and a little hat with a feather sticking out of it like a leafless

plant in a flower-pot, and was immediately struck with the incongruity of the spectacle thus presented to the public.

‘This is not the place to apply at. Go to the stage-door ; you must not come in here, you know,’ said he, hurriedly.

‘Which is the stage-door, if you please, sir ?’

‘Outside—round the corner.’

The acting-manager moved away in alarm, as he looked again at the picture in the mirror.

Folly, after some inquiries, found the stage-door ; with less ease she found some one to attend her, and then she was told not to come bothering at such a time as that.

‘When shall I come, if you please ?’ asked Folly.

‘Why, it’s not much good your coming at all,’ answered the stage-doorkeeper, testily.

He had been arranging some letters in the rack, and had given Folly scarcely a glance ; but now, the job being finished, he looked up and surveyed her with growing interest. Her beauty, even in the odd, mean dress she wore, was quite striking and exceptional. The dark, large eyes, with the little mole at the angle of the right, the pretty mouth and nose,

the cream-coloured skin, the long throat, the pose of the short body and long limbs, struck the professional eye of the man.

‘You can call if you like to-morrow morning,’ said he, in a more amiable tone, ‘about eleven.’ Then, as hope scintillated in Folly’s eyes, and, animating her face, made it ten times more attractive than before, he added, ‘If you have nothing to do, you can wait here till the opening is over, and see the ballet-master as he comes out.’

‘I will wait, if you please. I have nothing else to do.’

‘Then come in here and sit down by my fire out of the way.’

Folly took a seat by the fire, close to the wall, to be out of sight. She could just hear the distant voices from the stage, with occasional strains of music. The stage-doorkeeper had plenty to do ; people were constantly arriving ; the door kept squeaking as it opened and banging as it closed for best part of an hour, and the man had something to say to everyone that passed. Then the carpenters, wiping the perspiration from their faces with the sleeves of their white jackets, trooped out to get beer, and ran in again in a hurry for the next scene. There was continual bustle. A

woman in a brown waterproof, with a woollen shawl wrapped round her throat and the lower part of her face, looked in the porter's room, and, after a few words, passed through the door to the flight of stone steps leading up to the dressing-room.

'That's Mademoiselle Duprez,' said the stage-doorkeeper.

'Who's Mademoiselle Duprez?' asked Folly.

'Columbine. Don't you know anything about the theatre?'

'I haven't seen one for years—not since I was quite a little child.'

'Don't know anything about the stage—haven't been on before? Then how do you expect to get an engagement?' said the doorkeeper, in alarm.

'I can dance.'

'Jigs and things—street organs, hey?'

'No, ballets. I can dance well. My father—my foster-father—was a regular stage-dancer, and taught me—taught me beautifully.'

Folly sighed, and looked steadfastly in the fire.

'Rum little cure!' thought the doorkeeper, looking at her nodding plume. 'You can

take off your hat—that feather of yourn's gone wrong.'

Folly took off her hat, and set the tree-like feather straight and in its place. The light fell upon her head, making rich sunny tints on its waving tresses. Her hair had grown darker during the last few years, though it was still lighter than her eyebrows and eyelashes—they were black—and was screwed up in a tight knot behind.

'You've got a fine head of hair,' said the doorkeeper.

'I can sit on it when it's down.'

'So your foster-father was a pro., was he?'

'He was a dancer, and my foster-mother was a columbine, like the lady who passed just now.'

'What was her name?'

'Mrs. Fernandez.'

'What, old Tom Fernandez's wife?'

'Yes.'

'What—them as was killed in the accident at Weybridge?'

Folly answered with a silent nod, and turned her eyes to the fire again, twisting her fingers painfully.

The doorkeeper looked at her with interest. He divined from her manner that the subject

was painful, and was silent. The door creaked and banged less frequently now, so he brought a chair to the fire and sat down near Folly.

‘You and me’s old friends—what do you think of that? You must be the very little girl I see when I went home with Tom one day. He hadn’t no other little girl, had he?’

Folly shook her head.

‘I see you dance then, and told old Tom he ought to put you on the boards, but he was always against putting kids on too young. Well, this is strange! But how is it you’ve only got that dress on, and them old boots? Tom said he should leave you all his money.’

‘His brother had it, I believe.’

‘What, Sam?’

Folly nodded.

‘Ah, Sam wasn’t half such a man as Tom—a stupid sort of fellow, as let himself be ruled by his wife.’

Folly lifted her head at the mention of the wife; her little nose grew white, her lips thin, her eyes fierce with anger, and she said:

‘His wife is—is—she’s a devil!’

The doorkeeper chuckled. He liked Folly’s spirit.

‘She is a beast!’ said Folly, fiercely, her flesh quivering with rage.

‘I say, you’ve learnt some nice language somewhere.’

‘I can’t help it. Don’t let’s talk about her!’

‘Ah, well, I dare say she deserves wus language than you know. I’ll lay a quid she collared old Tom’s money, and destroyed his will or something.’

‘Yes—yes. Oh, if I could punish her!’

‘What would you do to her?’

‘I would take all that she loves from her. I would make her my servant, and never suffer her to do what she likes. I would starve her. I would dress her in rags, so that people should laugh at her when she went out. I would make her obey ugly, spiteful children—I would make her work—I would torture her in every way I could imagine.’

‘That’s how she’s served you, I expect?’

‘Yes, yes—for months and months—years. She told the gentleman from London who was going to make my father’s will that she would make me her daughter and be good to me; and that is how she served me.’

The doorkeeper swore a good round oath at Mrs. Sam Fernandez. Folly looked at him gratefully.

‘And when you couldn’t stand it any longer, you ran away, I suppose?’ said he.

‘Yes; I would have run away long ago, but I had no money. Sometimes her husband would give me a penny, telling me not to say anything about it, and them were good times for me. I hid the pennies under a stone in the yard for fear she should find them—see, here they are.’

She brought from her pocket an old doll’s frock sewn up to make a bag, and poured the pence into her lap—about thirty in all, which she patted and stroked affectionately.

‘Bless my soul! So when you had saved these you cut it?’

‘I sat up one night to iron this frock—it is my best. The gloves I got out of the dust-bin and washed. That feather I stole. Then when they all went out to a party this afternoon I ran away.’

‘I’d have set fire to the house before I started,’ said the doorkeeper.

‘I—I——’ Folly hesitated.

‘What did you do?’

‘I made the poker red-hot and poked it right through her likeness that she was so proud of.’

‘Good gal,’ said the doorkeeper, patting her back.

Folly caught his hand, and pressing it between hers, said :

‘I like you. I’ll be kind to you if I grow rich.’ Then suddenly she asked : ‘Have you got a wife?’

‘Yes, and kids as big as you.’

Folly sighed. ‘I would have gone home and mended your stockings and things for you if you hadn’t had anyone to do them.’

‘You’re a good gal, that’s what you are. How old are you?’

‘Fifteen.’

‘You’re tall, too. If it wasn’t for your short dress I should have thought you were seventeen.’

‘I grew very much when I had the fever.’

‘Have you been ill?’

‘I had brain-fever, and was ill a long while after—after *that*. When I heard he—he was very likely killed, I couldn’t eat and I couldn’t sleep, and at last one day I tumbled down giddy like, and never knew anything more for ever so long; and when I woke up I was in a strange place, and they had sold my rabbits, and my guineapigs, and my birds; all were gone, even my little kittens, and there was nothing of my old home left. My dresses were given to that woman’s children. They would not let me dance, and I could not sing. Oh, it was dreadful! And every night,

night after night, I dreamt that my dear father was back with me dancing our old dances, and for happiness I could not help crying. That woke me, and then I cried for misery. Even when I was awake I could see my dear old father, with his kind face, looking at me, and——'

She paused—looked down at the fire, looked up at the doorkeeper—then fell stroking the old feather in her hat idly, turning her eyes aside. Finally she dropped her hat, and, burying her face in her hands, burst into tears. The doorkeeper said nothing, but fidgeted on his chair, and gladly got up to go to the door when it creaked open.

It was some time before he came back, for he found business to do outside. When he returned he found Folly calm again, with her hat in her lap, her fingers knitted over her knee, and her eyes upon the fire. Her grief was past and they chatted discursively, until at length the doorkeeper, coming from a consultation with the fireman, said :

'The transformation is on, and the ballet-master will soon be out.'

Folly got up, smoothed back her hair, arranged the folds of her dress, put on her old gloves, and assumed an air of cheerfulness.

‘That’s the style. Señor Esperenza likes bright faces,’ said the doorkeeper, encouragingly.

Folly took the hint.

And now for half an hour or more there was ceaseless banging of the door, with gasps of pantomime music on each occasion, mingled with the faint sounds of laughter and applause from the house, as the actors and girls engaged in the opening came from their dressing-rooms to leave the theatre, some laughing, others humming tunes, and all cheerful. The pantomime had gone well, was the answer to all the doorkeeper’s questions.

At length, a short, ugly little foreigner, in a fur coat, came out.

The doorkeeper darted at him, and put the same question to him he had put to the girls—how had the pantomime gone?

Señor Esperenza shrugged his shoulders. It had gone well—‘all right’; but what could you expect with a ballet of English girls—pretty in face, but, *Carámba!* stupid and heavy as your ‘plom-puddings’? The doorkeeper agreed, sympathised, commiserated, and then entered upon the subject he had taken up.

After a brief conversation, Señor Esperanza entered the room with the door-keeper.

Folly rose and met the ballet-master's scrutinising glance boldly.

Señor Esperenza made her a most courteous bow. It was just the bow old Tom used to make to her; and she responded with the courtsey he had taught her to make. Señor Esperenza opened his eyes in astonishment, and then surveyed Folly from head to foot.

'*Quel bonheur!*' he murmured. '*Quelle chance! Voici le genre qui me convient!*'

'*J'en ressens la plus grande satisfaction, m'sieur,*' replied Folly, her old assurance returning with this expression of approval.

Though the girl could neither read nor write, she could speak indifferent good French glibly enough. She had learnt it readily from her mother as an accomplishment which other children did not attempt.

The ballet-master was delighted not less with her bold manner and the brilliant impudence of her face as she spoke than with her knowledge of a language which, though not his own, he had spoken during the best part of his life in the Opera-House at Paris.

'Ah, if I had only had you when rehearsals began, I might have made a success with my ballets!' said he.

'It was my misfortune,' answered Folly.

‘Nevertheless, we shall see what may be done now, mademoiselle. You will come to me to-morrow morning here, at half-past ten. You will not fail?’

Folly promised, and with a repetition of the formalities with which they had met they separated.

As he was leaving the room, he stopped suddenly and turned round, as if to reassure himself in some particular. He measured the girl through his narrowed eyes, nodding his head in slow approval. Then he left the room with a quick step, his weazen face wrinkled into a smile.

He had seen hundreds of girls in Folly’s position; he had introduced many to the stage who now held high positions as dancers, but never in his long experience had he seen one whose appearance had promised so well.

The door-keeper, who had witnessed this scene and listened to Folly’s French in astonishment, overtook Señor Esperenza at the outer door.

‘Do you think you can make anything of the child?’ he asked.

‘Child!—she is a woman!’ replied the ballet-master, with energy. ‘She shall be the queen of the stage if we can keep her on it. *There is the only difficulty: she is too pretty.*’



CHAPTER XI.

FOLLY OBTAINS AN ENGAGEMENT.

THE theatre is in obscurity. Boxes and stalls are draped in dingy cloths. A faint ray of daylight struggles through the skylight at the back of the gallery. One or two gas jets burn dimly in the corridor behind the first circle. In the pit an old woman is groping under the seats for playbills and orange-peel, while another knocks about with a broom sweeping the floor.

The curtain and drop-scene are up, and present the scaffolding of an elaborate 'set' and part of the transformation scene. A row of gaslights, set on a standard in the form of the letter T, fixed in the centre of the stage near the 'float,' sheds a flaming

light which fails to extend to the remoter parts of the stage. Near it stands a table and three chairs—a little further off a piano.

One or two lights in the flies and wings show the carpenters moving about in a dusty fog—the phantoms of a transformation.

Near the gaslight stands a large man in a long light ulster; he is the lessee, and is talking to Señor Esperenza, whose figure in contrast looks more than ever diminished and shrunken—an effect which is heightened by his cringing attitude. Folly, standing close by in her starched print frock, looks a head taller.

The lessee is in ill humour. He holds in his hands a bundle of newspapers, whose theatrical notices are less favourable in speaking of *The Garden* than of *The Lane*. Especially they praise *The Lane* ballet and the dancing of Mademoiselle Davoni, whereas the ballet at the Garden is mentioned only as presenting a grand spectacle.

This was the chill, depressing, spiritless reality to which Folly was brought from her dream of glittering splendour and warm enthusiasm.

She had gone home with the door-keeper and shared a bed with one of his children,

but for any sleep or material rest she got she might have wandered about the streets with her fancies. All night she thought of the encouragement she had received from the ballet-master, and allowed imagination to take the wildest flights into the future. She pictured her triumph in the forthcoming interview in all the rainbow tints of a young and lively fancy. It did not occur to her that the theatre might be otherwise than as she had always seen it—filled with people, glowing with warm light, glittering with tinselled scenery, and girls in dainty dresses. They would give her a suitable dress, the little old gentleman would smile and tell her to go on to the stage and dance, and as the band struck up she would bound on and pirouette down to the footlights, thrilling the audience with delighted admiration! Carried away by the excitement of these anticipations, she found her limbs at times striving to accompany her wild dream in involuntary motion.

Her little bed-fellow must have slept soundly or suffered considerably from her restlessness.

Between the vision and reality was as vast a difference as imagination could find.

‘Three papers mention Davoni,’ said the manager, gloomily. ‘Why is she not dancing in our show?’

‘Davoni — *Cáspita!* She’s forty. She danced in the ballet of the opera at Paris—it is twenty-five years ago. Davoni—*a bas!*’ replied Esperenza. ‘Sir, we shall find a young dancer that will make Davoni to hide herself.’

‘Where?’

‘Here—or you shall call me stupid fools!’ The ballet-master drew back, and extended his hand towards Folly.

‘That child!’ exclaimed the lessee, with a short, contemptuous laugh, turning as if he was about to walk away.

‘Well, if you will not be convinced——’ Esperenza concluded the sentence with a shrug.

‘Let’s see what she can do, then,’ retorted the lessee, crossing to the table, on which he seated himself and opened a newspaper carelessly.

Esperenza looked at Folly for a moment in doubt. It was too much to ask a girl to show her abilities as a dancer in such boots and such a dress. She must fail, and discredit his assertion.

Another child in Folly's position would have lost any courage she had at a proposal under such circumstances—would have declined it certainly, possibly with tears. That was just enough to make Folly attempt it. Her pride was stung by the lessee's contemptuous expression, and, besides that, she was animated by a feeling of generosity towards Esperenza.

As he looked at her the blood mounted to her cheeks, her eyes flashed, and she nodded eagerly to him.

‘Will you try to dance in that dress?’

‘Yes; but I should like music.’

‘I will play myself. What will you dance? It is impossible to expect you to succeed in any great attempt. Try something simple,’ he added, in an undertone, speaking in French. ‘Do you know a gavotte?’

‘Yes. But I would like something livelier—anything.’

She walked beside Esperenza to the piano with a light, springing step, and shaking her arms as if she were loosening her joints for the attempt. The lessee looked up with interest and laid down his paper.

Esperenza was far more nervous than the girl. He played a well-known ballet tune.

‘Will that do?’ he asked.

‘Yes, yes—that will do,’ she answered. Her heart began to throb violently, and her voice sounded strange to her own ears.

‘Tell me when you are ready.’

‘I will clap my hands.’

She looked with a quick, comprehensive glance round the stage, measuring it for her work. Then she glanced at the lessee, who had left the table and seated himself in a chair, fixing his eyes attentively upon her. In the pit she discovered an old woman, leaning on her broom, and another beside her; she saw their eyes. They were audience enough—better than the rabbits and kittens she had once been content with.

Esperenza, noticing her as she looked about her, trembled. Almost he hoped she was about to decline the attempt. Then, as she turned, her eyes flashing with excitement, his confidence was restored. He smiled and nodded encouragingly, his fingers resting on the keys of the piano.

He had taken off his coat, and laid the long scarlet silk handkerchief from his throat on the piano. The bright colour caught Folly’s eye.

‘Will you lend me that?’ she asked, quickly, laying her hand on it.

‘Yes, yes. Shall I begin?’

‘No, wait till I clap.’

She snatched up the scarlet silk, and light as a fairy ran away with it to the upper end of the stage. Stepping aside among the wings, she flung her hat upon the ground, and, tearing off her hateful dress, stood in her bodice and petticoat; in a moment she tied the silk handkerchief round her waist; then she clapped her hands.

Esperenza played the conventional chords with which a danseuse makes her entrance, and Folly from the obscurity came down to the light, timing her descent with the music as exactly as if she had measured the distance in a dozen rehearsals.

The white bodice and petticoat, with the scarlet scarf, was a not unpicturesque dress, and displayed her beautifully proportioned arms and graceful throat to advantage. The change had been made in a minute.

Esperenza took his hands from the piano in astonishment; the lessee opened his mouth in surprise.

In the pause Folly, stationed in a graceful pose, waited for the music to recommence, and smiled witchingly into the empty house. For her it was not empty: her imagination filled

the seats with admiring spectators. As the interval extended beyond the proper length, she rose from her stooping position, and, turning with anger upon Esperenza, stamped her foot impatiently.

He recommenced, and away the girl bounded, her arms extended, as though she were swimming through space, and her legs moving as though they had no weight to carry. Standing in the light, the lessee lost sight of her in a minute as she gyrated into the darkness; the next minute she reappeared twirling down the opposite side of the stage. Esperenza could see nothing; his whole attention was given to keeping good time for his *protégée*. The lessee passed him going to the wings to get a clearer view of the dancer, and exclaimed, with quick excitement, ‘By George! what a girl!’ The old ballet-master grew warm.

‘Quick!’ called Folly.

Perspiration came upon Esperenza’s forehead as he obeyed.

‘Quicker!’ she cried, whirling past him.

His fingers and arms ached—he missed a note, stumbled in trying to pick it up—then stopped, fairly exhausted.

‘Bravo, bravo!’ exclaimed the lessee. The

two old women in the pit clapped their hands.

‘You have spoilt my *finale*,’ said Folly, coming down to the piano, and addressing Esperenza in a tone of indignation. She looked like an injured queen, her dark brows knitted and her eyes flashing.

‘Mademoiselle, I—I—’ stammered the ballet-master, awed by her anger.

Folly turned away, walked under the gas-light, and holding it with one hand kicked the standard petulantly. She pouted and held down her head—the very picture of a disappointed child.

By accident or design her hair had fallen down, and the soft, rich mass thrown back from one shoulder fell over the other and formed a background to the delicate profile of her face, presented to the two gentlemen at the piano.

Lessee and ballet-master looked at her, then at each other.

‘Well?’ asked Esperenza, triumphantly.

‘You’re right. She’s a prodigy. Pity you didn’t find her before, though. What are her terms?’

‘I haven’t asked.’

Folly getting cooler and her excitement abating, she recollected her position—realised

that she was no longer a child dancing with her foster-father, and so felt rather ashamed of her childish behaviour as the men came towards her.

‘Accept my apologies for failing to play equally well with your dancing. It was an impossibility,’ said Esperenza, bowing.

Folly blushed and returned his salute.

‘May I ask what terms you require,’ asked the lessee.

‘I want enough for board and lodging and clothes.’

The cautious lessee, hearing this, and remembering the starched print dress, asked if she would accept three guineas a week.

‘Yes, that will do,’ said Folly, who thought there must certainly be enough pennies in three guineas to meet her requirements.

‘The treasurer shall make out an agreement for you to sign.’

‘I can’t write.’

The announcement did not surprise the lessee ; good dancing and good education were not to be expected in combination.

‘Your mark will do. You may consider yourself engaged for six weeks certain ; we can make a fresh arrangement at the end of that time. What is your name ?’

‘Folly.’

‘Ah, good!’ exclaimed Esperenza. ‘La Folie—a capital name—and with a dress after the design of M. Gravin——’

‘No, no; we have had enough French; the public is getting tired of them. We will show what our own country can produce. Folly is a good name enough, and we will write to Alfred Thompson or another of our own artists for a dress. It shall be put in hand at once. You can make your arrangements, Esperenza, so that we may announce our new dancer for Saturday next—evening show. That gives us six days; will that do?’

‘Yes, if the dress is finished.’

‘I will see to that myself. If you want any new properties let me know.’

As this conversation proceeded Folly trembled in every fibre of her body. The réalisation of her fondest hopes was at hand. It seemed strangely incongruous to hear the details discussed in such cold, matter-of-fact terms, when her own mind was transported with such delirious anticipations.

Esperenza saw her trembling, and said kindly, but with the utmost deference:

‘You are cold, ma’melle. Will you resume your dress?’

Folly walked up the stage, the men following her with their eyes. She was a subject for a painter—the tall, lithe girl with long and beautifully rounded arms and legs, bare shoulders and clustering hair, untying the scarlet silk handkerchief from her waist as she went lightly along. She returned with her hair screwed up, the little hat perched on the top, and her dress sticking out in angular points, showing nothing of her limbs but their extremities; her hands red, her feet in broken boots. She looked now a coffee-shop drudge; the picturesqueness was gone.

The lessee repented having offered her so much.

She carried the silk wrap in her hand.

‘Thank you for lending me your handkerchief,’ she said, offering it to Esperenza.

‘Will you do me the honour to accept it, ma’m selle?’

Folly’s eyes beamed with gratitude; she tied it round her throat.

Generosity is infectious. The lessee put his hand in his pocket and pulled out a handful of gold.

‘Would you like a week’s salary in advance?’ he asked.

‘Thank you—I have not much money,’ she

answered, and took the gold gratefully enough ; but to her it had not the value of the silk handkerchief—that was something for all to see and admire.

As she left the theatre with the stage-doorkeeper she called his attention to it.

‘Yes ; but have you got an engagement ?’ he asked.

‘For six weeks.’

‘At how much ?’

‘Three guineas.’

‘Three guineas ! Why, that’s twice what I get. Three guineas !’

‘Yes ; and here’s a week’s wages in advance. How many pennies is it ?’

‘Oh, gracious me, I don’t know ! A whole bagful ; more than you could carry, I should think. Why, you’ll be quite a lady.’

That prospect was pleasant to Folly.



CHAPTER XII.

THE DIARY OF A WEEK.

THESE transactions took place on the 27th, Sunday. The business at the theatre detained those concerned until half-past one. Folly accepted the doorkeeper's invitation to go home with him; but, holding her newly-acquired fortune in her hands, she already meditated independence. She set herself to arrange what was to be done with her money.

‘How much does it cost a girl to live for a week in London?’ she asked.

‘Oh, a gal could live handsome on a pound,’ answered the doorkeeper.

‘What, one of these?’ She held up a sovereign.

‘Yes, handsome.’

Folly thought for a time, and did a sum in mental arithmetic. If she kept one sovereign for herself, how many should she have left? Two. These were susceptible of equal division between her two friends. The ballet-master was a gentleman, and evidently liked fine things, so she would simply buy him the most beautiful handkerchief she could get for a pound; but it was harder to decide what she could give the doorkeeper, who wore nothing but a spotted cotton necktie. It was just possible he would prefer money to fine things to wear, for he had never given a second glance at her scarlet wrap, and had talked of nothing else but her good fortune in getting such a high salary. Before offering him anything, however, she determined to make herself sure on this point, in order that one should be as fairly considered as the other.

‘Which do you like best?’ she asked; ‘beautiful clothes or money?’

‘Money,’ answered he, without a moment’s hesitation.

‘Then, will you take this as a present from me?’ She held the sovereign out to him, with the pleasant expectation of seeing him look happy.

The man opened his eyes and mouth in astonishment, and looked at her as if he was at a loss to understand what she meant.

‘I want you to take this. I like you. You have been very kind to me.’

‘Take that—from you! No, that I won’t.’

‘Do. I shall be very sorry if you don’t. I want to give it to you.’

Folly grew very red.

‘No, thank you. I’m not going to take your money. Keep it yourself.’

‘No, that I won’t,’ said Folly, stopping short. ‘If it isn’t good enough for you, it isn’t good enough for me.’ And with that she stepped to the parapet of the bridge they were crossing and flung the sovereign into the Thames.

‘Great heavens! what have you done?’ exclaimed the doorkeeper, rushing to the side and looking over, as if he expected to see the lost money.

He got no answer from Folly, who walked on in sullen silence. Nor was it until he had explained his generous reasons for refusing her present that she would speak at all. Before they reached Hercules Buildings, where the doorkeeper lived, they were good

friends again ; but he was the only one who thought ruefully of the sovereign lying in the river mud under Waterloo Bridge.

On Monday, going to rehearsal, Folly begged the doorkeeper to show her a good shop for silk handkerchiefs. He took her to Piccadilly Circus, where she walked boldly into Swan and Edgar's.

'What do you want here?' asked a shopwalker, arresting her close by the entrance.

'I want the finest silk handkerchief you can give me for that,' she answered, offering a sovereign.

The shopwalker stared at her, examined the coin critically, and led her with doubtful steps to a remote part of the shop. After a little hesitating conference behind the counter, the shopman displayed the best he had for Folly to choose from. It pleased her to find that they were even better than the one she wore. Having chosen the most charming one she could see, it was put in a box for her, and she rejoined her companion outside.

The digression made them five minutes late at the theatre. Señor Esperenza was already waiting there, and growing anxious with the delay. Folly presented the box timidly.

He was surprised at the generosity of his *protégée*, and accepted the gift with a thousand expressions of pleasure. Folly was elated with joy.

Then they went to work. There was much to be done. Esperenza had been up all night composing a ballet, which necessitated a re-arrangement of the performance, the composition of music, and a hundred other troubles. Looking at Folly in her strange trim, it seemed preposterous that such a creature as she should revolutionise the company, and give every one extra work and fresh rehearsals.

From the *chef d'orchestre* to the call-boy, everyone concerned did his or her best to make the girl know what trouble she was giving. They could have chosen no better method of delighting her. They showed her her own importance.

When the stage was cleared to prepare for the morning performance, and the stage-manager announced that there would be a rehearsal of the new ballet every morning for the rest of the week, there was loud grumbling, and the *première danseuse* declared she would resign.

‘As you please,’ said Esperenza, with

a shrug. 'We must try to do without you.'

The *danseuse* knitted her eyebrows and looked at Folly as if she intended to annihilate her. Folly met her glance undaunted, and with the most impudent smile at her command stared at her until she withdrew from the stage.

Her *insouciance* increased with the difficulties opposed to her. Her self-esteem was established and not to be shaken.

'When she pauses to pick up the flower,' said Esperenza, explaining his scheme of the ballet to the *chef d'orchestre*, 'there should be a leetle slow music.'

'I know ; a movement something like this—eh?' returned the composer, running his fingers over the keys of the piano.

'The movement's all right, but the tune's horrid,' said Folly.

The *chef* glared at her, and then said, sarcastically :

'Perhaps you can suggest a better ?'

'Of course I can, although it's not my trade,' said she ; and then, before all the assembled artists, she hummed an air which *she* considered better.

Folly was here called away to the manager's

room, where the artist was waiting to see her with a view to sketching a suitable dress. She stood to him in the impromptu costume in which she had danced the day before.

‘By Jove, what a glorious figure!’ said he to the lessee, in a low voice.

Folly’s sharp ears caught the words, and the unction permeated to her soul.

‘In what character does the young lady dance?’ asked the artist, as he hastily sketched the outline of Folly’s figure.

‘Her name is Folly, and she danced like one possessed: that is your cue for a dress. Her dance is independent of the opening, and incidental.’

‘A “Folly” dress, then, would be suitable: parti-coloured pale blue and white satin, trimmed with silver *grelots*; silk tights, also parti-coloured—by the way, is she to be a male or female “Folly”?’

‘Female. I want her to appear what she is—a beautiful young girl, with impudence, vivacity, and lots of life and go.’

Folly heard the artist’s description of her dress—the mention of satin and silk and silver bells—with twinkling eyes, and listened to the lessee’s description of her character with not less of interest. Her key to success

and popularity was to be beautiful and young, impudent and lively.

‘I understand,’ said the artist; ‘skirts rather long than short, with plenty of soft white frill; and shoes—can you dance with heels?’

‘I can dance with anything; I danced in these.’ Folly showed her old boots. The gentlemen laughed.

‘Then, shoes with a little heel—so; and a *grelot* instead of a buckle. But these white frills will necessitate another colour with the pale blue, to contrast.’

‘I saw a lovely white silk just shot with pink—the palest salmon,’ suggested the lessee.

‘That would do. Then, a little Phrygian cap, with two long, narrow feeders, parti-coloured, to correspond with the dress. How about the hair?’

‘Oh, it’s lovely hair—natural wave and curl, is it not, my child?’

Folly unfastened and let it fall in a twinkling.

‘I would gather it in loosely at the back of the neck, have it clasped with a little paste diamond brooch, and allowed to fall in its own natural curls. There, that is a rough idea of the costume.’

‘ Very fetching,’ said the lessee, looking at it.

‘ May I see it, if you please?’ said Folly, unable to repress her curiosity. She could hardly bring herself to part with the sketch ; her head was fairly turned.

Standing by Esperenza’s side, she watched the morning performance through, and expressed her profound contempt for the dancing of the *première danseuse*. That lady, under the critical eye of the child in the print dress, exerted herself to the utmost, and, in attempting a difficult *pas*, nearly came to grief. Folly laughed ; and the Frenchwoman, coming off the stage in a towering passion, declared she would not dance again.

In the evening Folly went to The Lane and saw the dancing of Davoni ; and profited by the lesson. Returning with the door-keeper to his rooms in Hercules Buildings, she would not go to bed until she had executed Davoni’s best effects, with improvements of her own. Her audience was sleepy and lethargic—a disposition which prevented an open rupture at that time, despite the unpleasant things that Folly said, and which at an earlier hour would have undoubtedly enlivened the proceedings.

On Tuesday Folly was measured for her costume, and went through a long rehearsal, trying the patience of all concerned by her perpetual objections.

On Wednesday there was only a short rehearsal, concluding with remonstrances from the *chef d'orchestre*, from the acting manager, and even from Esperenza, in consequence of Folly's 'obstructiveness.' General predictions were made that the ballet would never be arranged in time for representation on Saturday.

Thursday was a delightful day. The printer brought a proof-poster, which Esperenza got hold of and displayed to Folly.

'There! what do you think of that?' he asked.

'Tremendous big letters—what are they all about?' returned Folly.

'Ah! you can't read. See—this top line—"The Garden Pantomime. Jack and the Beanstalk."'

'But the big letters?'

'"Folly!"'

Folly felt a thrill as if cold water were being poured down her back.

'My name! And the little words underneath?'

“‘Folly, the new *danseuse*. *Début*, Saturday, January 3.’”

The rehearsal went well after that, and took shape quickly. Folly was most amiable, and won the affections of all the men she had enraged the day before. The women she took no notice of; they hated her more than ever.

On Friday, going to the theatre, she saw the posters announcing her *début* displayed on the hoardings. She stopped before each one, looking up at the great letters with intense delight, and then at the people around, wishing they could know that she was the *danseuse* referred to. ‘They will all know me soon,’ she thought.

The *costumière* brought the dress, all glittering with silver *grelots*. Her head grew giddy as she looked at herself in a cheval-glass.

‘I will dance in it this rehearsal,’ she said.

‘The body wants taking in a little here,’ urged the dressmaker.

‘Do it after rehearsal, there’s a darling!’ pleaded Folly, looking with her most bewitching smile at the *costumière*. The woman, uninfluenced by any jealous feeling, and fascinated by the girl’s beauty and sweet

smile, consented to defer the alterations, and Folly ran down to the stage in her new dress, the *costumière* following.

The men and women were standing about in groups talking; the rehearsal was waiting for the girl.

To enter with a simper and a blush, and stand awkwardly to receive admiration, was not in Folly's disposition. Going up to the top of the stage by the wings unseen, she cried, 'Here I am!' and then, with a clear, ringing laugh, she pirouetted swiftly down to the light.

Every eye was attracted. Astonishment was succeeded by admiration, which the men openly and loudly expressed, and even the women echoed.

'Are you doubtful of her success now?' asked Esperenza of the lessee, who had been depressed by the rumours of 'obstructiveness' and evil prognostications which had reached his ears.

'No; that will do. And that is how she should enter—with those words and with that manner. Can you do that, Folly?'

'To be sure I can,' answered the girl.

And on Saturday she came upon the scene with the self-same cry and ringing laughter,

taking the audience by surprise, and infecting them with her own wild spirit of gaiety and delight, which never flagged for an instant from her first step upon the stage till the moment when she unwillingly withdrew.



CHAPTER XIII.

A ROCKET ASCENDS.

ROLLY'S success was complete. Her dream was realised. If she felt disappointment it was because she had not enough to do. She would have liked to be on the stage during the whole performance—harlequinade included.

The lessee himself was waiting at the wing with a shawl to wrap round her shoulders when she came off from acknowledging the applause of the audience.

‘Are you pleased?’ she asked, looking up into his face.

‘I am delighted!—astonished!—charmed!’

‘Where is my friend, M’sieur Esperenza? Is he satisfied?’

‘He disappeared five minutes ago.’

‘That was unkind.’

‘Hush ! They have stopped the performance ; they are calling for you again. You must go on !’

The applause, which had not ceased, swelled to such proportions that the orchestra stopped, and the *chef* looked into the wing for instructions.

‘Yes, you must go on again !’ said the lessee, removing the shawl from Folly’s shoulders.

‘May I dance again ?’

‘No, no !—by no means ! You mustn’t make yourself cheap. Let the audience come again if they wish to see you dance. Now run on, my dear.’

Folly ran on with an unconventional step that showed the eagerness with which she accepted the applause, and with her pretty arms stretched out as though she would have embraced those who honoured her.

‘Bravo ! Holé salero ! a la muchácha— a la saliente vailarina !’ cried an excited, wrinkled old man in an upper box, and down at the girl’s feet he flung an immense bouquet.

Folly picked up the *jardinet*, and, raising her eyes, recognised her friend and benefactor, Esperenza. She made him the deepest

curtsey, and, getting off the stage, buried her face in the flowers and burst into tears.

The lessee hurried her away to his room, and there she was still sobbing hysterically when Esperenza tapped at the door.

Knowing who knocked, the lessee, who had seen only the excitement of old artists, and was at a loss to understand Folly's tears, called out :

‘Come in ; come in. Here,] what’s the matter with the little girl ? She has been crying as if her heart would break ever since she came off with your bouquet, and I can’t get a word of explanation from her.’

‘Ah, it requires no explanation !’ said the old ballet-master, nodding his head and smiling. ‘A great dancer must weep or go mad with the first success. I was quite mad for two weeks—quite mad !’

‘And you are all quite satisfied with me ?’ cried Folly.

‘Have I not told you so ?’ replied Esperenza gently, just touching the bouquet.

‘Yes, yes. You would not have given me the bouquet if the people had not made me come on twice. How beautifully you showed me your admiration. It was that made me cry. But what a little fool I am !’

Then Folly burst into a long, hysterical laugh, more painful to hear than her sobs.

Esperenza brought forth from one pocket a scent-bottle and from another a box of bonbons, and presented them gravely.

Meanwhile, the lessee, having withdrawn to the adjoining apartment, was executing his own characteristically English views of gratitude and sympathy. 'Banks,' said he to his man, 'champagne and glasses—next room.' Then he sat down at the table, drew the writing materials together, and began to write. He had finished by the time Banks returned from carrying the wine into the other room.

'Take this letter down to the stage-door, to be given to the young lady when she leaves.'

As he spoke the lessee addressed the envelope, blotted it, and rose from his chair.

Returning to Folly he found her calmer, and eating bonbons with avidity.

The cork popped, frightening the girl, for she had never heard the sound before. Out bubbled the sparkling wine, and Folly drank champagne for the first time.

As if she had not had sufficient excite-

ment ! Poor child, there was none to pity her, nobody to protect her from this cruel kindness !

Taking off her silk and satin, her silver and glistening paste, with a sigh she resumed her black cotton stockings, her broken boots, her print calico dress, now limp and dirty with a week's exposure to London fogs, and her child's hat.

The doorkeeper handed her a letter.

'What does it say outside ?' she asked.

"Miss—Folly," said the doorkeeper.

She looked at it attentively. It was becoming important that she should know the look of her own name. Then she opened it with considerable curiosity.

It contained a long slip of paper with something written on a pink surface, folded in a double sheet of paper, on which was just a line of writing. Folly turned them this way and that, looked in the envelope to see if there was anything else ; then, appealing to her friend the doorkeeper for explanation, said :

'What's it all about, do you know ?'

The doorkeeper, who, seeing the pink and white slip, was as curious about it as she,

drew near to make the investigation readily enough.

‘Why, bless me, it’s a cheque! and——’

‘What’s a cheque?’

‘A cheque? Why, a cheque’s—a cheque’s worth a lot of money; and this is for five-and-twenty pounds. It’s a present from the lessee. It’s written on this paper, see—“The lessee begs Folly to accept the enclosed cheque as a slight recognition of her valuable services.” There!’

‘A nice letter, isn’t it?’ said Folly, smiling.

‘Yes, but look at the cheque; that’s nicer still.’

‘Why, who will give me anything for that?’ asked Folly, looking incredulously at the cheque.

‘I will, as soon as we get home. I’ll give you five-and-twenty pounds for it.’

‘Thank you!’

Folly put the letter in her pocket, but the bouquet she carried in her hand, causing no little astonishment among the late people they met on their way to Lambeth.

The doorkeeper’s wife kept the joint savings in an old stocking, and from this hoard change for the cheque was laid out before Folly.

Some time after, when the woman was alone, Folly said to her :

‘Your husband is very kind and very good ; but he’s very stupid. He likes money better than anything, but he won’t take it when he is asked to.’

‘Why, that is stupid, to be sure,’ answered the wife, who did not participate in her husband’s delicacy.

Folly put her hand in her pocket, and taking out about four-fifths of her gold, said :

‘Will you put this in the bag with the other money, and don’t say anything about it?’

‘But, my dear !’ said the woman, gasping for breath as she looked at the sum offered, ‘my dear, we’ve not done enough to deserve all that !’

‘*He* has. If it had not been for him I shouldn’t have got those beautiful flowers. I might not have been engaged at all. Now, don’t you be stupid.’

The argument was conclusive. The doorkeeper’s wife checked her propensity to be stupid, and took the money, and, indeed, brought all her wisdom to bear upon the doorkeeper when he, on hearing of Folly’s generosity, expressed his determination to restore at least some of the money. She

prevailed over his intention with difficulty ; nevertheless she *did* prevail ; as what wife, not absolutely dumb, would not ?

In the evening she went out and found the dressmaker, whose private address she had obtained, and gave her the rest of her money excepting a few shillings which remained of the sovereign she had reserved to herself the previous week. Then she was happy.

The next evening, when she was about to leave the theatre, she encountered the lessee, who was talking on the staircase with a noble patron of the drama.

‘Folly,’ said he, ‘how is it you still wear that horrid dress of yours ? Why don’t you buy yourself something better ?’

‘I have no money,’ replied Folly, blushing.

‘But you received my letter ?’

‘With the twenty-five pounds—yes. I spent that on Sunday.’

The lessee held his breath ; the nobleman burst into loud laughter.

Folly frowned.

‘What’s the use of money if you don’t spend it ?’ she asked.

‘Well, you know how to,’ said the lessee.

‘Yes, thank you,’ retorted Folly, throwing up her head.

The nobleman was highly delighted. He took out his card-case.

‘Do you know a respectable shop where you could buy a dress?’ he asked.

‘Yes; there is a very respectable shop in Piccadilly Circus.’

‘To be sure. There is Swan and Edgar’s, if I am not mistaken.’

‘That is the place. I bought a very good handkerchief there for a pound.’

Again a burst of laughter offended Folly’s ears.

‘Go to that respectable shop again to-morrow afternoon, Folly. Give them this card, and choose a pretty dress. I’ll pay for it.’

The nobleman offered his card. Folly, putting her hands behind her, said :

‘Thank you. I’d rather wear my old frock than accept a better from one who comes here to laugh at me.’

With the most dignified bow she was about to withdraw, when the nobleman, putting his hand on her shoulder, said :

‘We are very rude to laugh so, aren’t we? Well, we are only men. You must forgive us. I laughed because—because I couldn’t help it, not from any wish to offend. On the

contrary, I came behind here on purpose to make your acquaintance, and tell you how charmed I have been with your exquisite performance, which I saw for the first time this evening.'

Folly's countenance brightened into a smile.

'And now,' he continued, offering his card again, 'may I ask you to make use of my card and select a couple of dresses more becoming to you than the one you wear?'

After that Folly did not hesitate; she accepted the card in her sweetest manner—a manner which would have made a plain girl fascinating.

'Here's another cheque—how much is that worth?' she asked, handing the card to the doorkeeper.

He explained how it must be used.

The next morning Folly sought her new friend the dressmaker, and together they went in the afternoon to Swan and Edgar's, where she selected two dresses, which were in accordance with their joint idea of the beautiful.

They were costly. 'What does that matter?' asked Folly, when the dressmaker pointed out the fact as an objection. 'The dresses please me—that is everything: it doesn't

matter whether they are cheap or dear. How silly some people are about accepting presents. If you set your mind upon giving some one a present, and some one would not accept it, would you not feel disappointed ?

‘ Yes.’

‘ Well, and would it not be ungrateful of some one to disappoint you after you had done all in your power to be nice and kind to her ?’

‘ Why, looking at it that way, so it would,’ said the dressmaker. So the dresses were taken away, and doubtless the nobleman opened his eyes over the bill.

Folly fell in love with the dressmaker—the only woman she ever could be amiable with—and came to an arrangement with her by which they should live together in the same house. By this means she could watch the making of the dresses and assist.

To harmonise with her dress, boots, gloves, a hat, and other affairs had to be bought, and, as she had no money of her own, she was compelled to borrow.

She was in debt about fifteen pounds when she at length discarded her old dress and walked out in the new ; but then she looked like a young duchess, and people turned round

to admire her, so the obligation weighed but lightly on her mind.

It was not long before she paid off the loan with interest, for the lessee doubled her salary as her reputation increased and the receipts went up. It was to her he owed his success that season.

Her little sitting-room was never without a bouquet—sometimes it contained two or three. They were lightly valued, and when faded were thrown away without a thought. Thanks to her friend the dressmaker she soon learnt that they were not her friends who cast them at her feet.

‘They are cheap and selfish compliments,’ said her friend. The man who pays his ill-spiced half-a-crown and applauds you from a corner of the pit is the better friend. Nine out of ten of the men who throw a guinea bouquet do so to be stared at by the house and talked about in their clubs; as for the tenth, he’s worse than the other nine put together. You’ll find them out soon.’

There was one bouquet which Folly never parted with; it was the jardinet thrown to her by *Esperenza*. She kept it with the lessee’s letter.

Folly never forgot a friend. Lightly as

she valued money or its equivalents, the generosity of the giver, if it was sincere and unselfish, was registered in her heart as a debt to be repaid whenever opportunity occurred.

If she remembered her friends she did not forget her enemies. The first poster announcing her appearance that she could obtain she sent by post, in an official-looking envelope, unstamped, to Mrs. Sam Fernandez. Her old clothes she also sent to the same lady by carrier, with a polite note, which she induced her friend to write for her, explaining that she sent the rags back with the *hope* that Mrs. Sam would one day be thankful for them.

Folly had now arrived at an age when her character was determined and beyond radical alteration. Less than a palmist's skill is necessary to predict her future.

As we leave her now we shall find her presently. She is started in her brilliant upward course, like some cunningly devised and brilliant pyrotechnic. We avert our eyes for a moment, to return and find her still rising higher and yet higher above the heads of the wondering and admiring crowd. Anon the zenith is reached, and then comes a glittering

coruscation, at which spectators exclaim in astonishment, as though the event were unanticipated.

After the brilliant close who will care for the empty shell, or even think where it may fall !



CHAPTER XIV.

THE VICAR OF ST. BARNABAS.

THE parish of Tangley comprises about sixty square miles of common land, six cultivated farms, Aveling Hall, with its surrounding acres of park and pasture, and the irregular row of houses composing the village of Tangley. Its population consists of not more than one hundred and fifty souls, the servants at the Hall included, and to supply their wants there is one general shop, one public-house, and one church.

The church, standing a little back from the highway, is *en face* with the public-house ; the village tails off down the road in the direction of Chertsey. From a balloon, or from a moral point of view, it would seem that the

head of the village was vastly out of proportion with the body it had to feed, somewhat like a 'loggerhead' or tadpole in its earliest stage of development.

Tangley itself and the surrounding country is as pretty a part of Surrey as there is. Standing in the churchyard of St. Barnabas—the church is situated on the hill—and looking over the village one sees an undulating plain stretching far away, until in this hazy autumn afternoon it is hard to say where the earth ends and the sky begins in the blue distance. The foreground is purple with heather. Turning round, one looks down upon the grand oaks of Aveling Park, and catches a glimpse of the lake formed there by the meandering Bray. A stack of twisted Elizabethan red brick chimneys indicates the position of the Hall; the thin streams of greyish-blue smoke rising perpendicularly in the still air are conspicuous by contrast with the dark foliage of the oaks beyond. On the southern boundary of the park the squalid huts of Sandy Lane may just be seen, and beyond them the even fields of red-brown corn belonging to the farm at Mayford; but these are not part of Tangley parish.

Tangley Vicarage cannot be seen from the

road ; it lies beyond the church across the glebe nestled in the side of the hill—a quaint old house, with a dozen spare rooms that are never used, overgrown with clematis and jasmine of ancient growth, brightened up by a profusely flowering Gloire de Dijon of more recent planting. It is surrounded by a wilderness of a garden, with quaint box-edged walks and eccentric beds of free-growing annuals, which make no pretence to order or regularity in their arrangement. The gardener has clearly a preference for scarlet gladiolus and pink hollyhocks over other flowers. Before the house is a smooth lawn, with an apple-tree in the centre—gone out of the perpendicular with its weight of fruit, apparently — and guarded by four grim old arbor vitæ, which stand at each corner like sentinels.

The vicarage, with its garden, its orchard, its piggery, stables, and cow-lewen, its glebe land, and its common rights, is given to the vicar, with tithes to the annual amount of £500, in return for his ministration to the spiritual requirements of Tangle.

Tangle is not exacting in this respect. If Boniface, at the Lion, had not had more to do than the vicar of the church opposite, he

would have to shut up his shop and go elsewhere for *his* living.

There were scarcely any poor in the parish, and the most pious farmer did not care to go more than once a week to church. Sir Andrew Aveling himself, though most exemplary in observing the ceremonies of the church, did not attend oftener than once on the Sunday. The baronet was not in need of reformation, so what necessity was there for him to go to church more frequently? He went in the morning to hear a good sermon; he stayed at home in the evening to eat a good dinner. Nevertheless there were two services at St. Barnabas's every Sunday, and Sir Andrew sent as many servants as could be spared from the Hall to represent him. They sat under the organ-loft, and formed no inconsiderable part of the congregation. Sir Andrew's pew was a square, roomy apartment, with high, comfortable backs to the seats nearer the pulpit.

In the morning the vicar preached a sermon for Sir Andrew which no one quite understood; in the evening he preached a sermon for the servants which went home to their understandings.

It will be seen that the vicar received his living from the baronet.

Besides these services, in which he was assisted by a curate, a clerk, and a pew-opener, the vicar had little else to do.

It was for him to rest six days and work on the seventh. One may say he was well paid for his services.

With these facts before him, the reader may easily picture the vicar a slavish, servile old man, with just enough stupidity to save him from being a hypocrite, and just enough cunning to save him from being a fool ; with more difficulty he may imagine the man holding such a post to be young, intelligent, and honest in principle. Yet this was the character of Richard Vane, Vicar of St. Barnabas, Tangley.

At Oxford he had saved the life of Roland, Sir Andrew Aveling's only son, when that young man, with characteristic rashness, undertook to row round the osiers by Burley Mill, and was within an ace of being drawn under the mill-wheel, and subsequently he had rescued him from many scrapes into which his headlong and impetuous temperament hurried him. In grateful recognition of these offices the baronet offered Richard Vane, who had just passed through his ordination, the living of St. Barnabas, which was then vacant by the

death of the Venerable Joshua Slogo. Richard Vane accepted the benefice without hesitation, and wrote at once to his sister Margaret—then holding a situation as governess at a school in London—to come and share his good fortune.

On this Sunday afternoon in August, 1869, the brother and sister are under the apple-tree on the lawn—Richard stretched out on the grass with his hands clasped under the back of his head, looking up through the foliage; Margaret seated in an American chair, with one of George Eliot's novels in her lap. The vicar wears a light alpaca jacket, and his clerical waistcoat is unbuttoned. His sister is dressed in a costume of *écru* French piqué, trimmed with white lace and pale blue; dainty plaited lace frills are about her throat and wrists. She is swinging one foot listlessly—for she has reached a somewhat dry part of the novel—and a little neat blue shoe peeps in and out the kilted margin of her under-skirt.

Those four old *arbor vitæ* at the corners of lawn have seen many generations of vicars and vicar's sisters on that lawn; but a vicar unbuttoned, and without a black cloth coat on his back, and a vicar's sister with heels to

her shoes and a flower in her hair—never. Anything less Sunday-like than their behaviour, more unsacerdotal than their appearance, they cannot have seen since they were planted.

Beyond the privet-hedge that forms the boundary of the flower-garden a maid in a spotless white muslin apron and cap is shaking a tree for greengages. It is near tea-time, and Mr. Vane likes fruit. As she stoops to pick up the rich wasp-bitten fruit and put it on the plate, a stone glances by. She looks round in surprise, and seeing no one, fancies she was mistaken, and returns to her occupation. Another stone flies through the air, and this time strikes her on the back. There could be no mistake about that; it was a palpable hit. Behind her is the holly hedge dividing the garden from the paddock. The stone must have come from thence. Was it the cow-boy or—sweet thought!—the young man from the general shop who took this means of attracting her attention?

Looking towards the hedge, with cheeks even redder than the sun has painted them, she hears a low whistle. Her heart throbs, and she looks round cautiously, standing on tip-toe to look over the privet-hedge. Miss

Vane is still reading, and there is no sign of master.

‘Pst! Jenny!’ whispers a voice from beyond the holly.

Jenny hums an old hymn, and strolls down towards the hedge.

‘Here! Jenny!’

The voice is not the cow-boy’s, nor the dulcet expression of the grocer’s assistant. Whose can it be? Still humming, she peeps this way and that through the hedge, until at length she catches sight of a face.

‘Oh, Mr. Roland!’ she exclaims under her breath. Next dearest to a lover in a maid’s heart is the visitor who never forgets to give her half-a-crown when he leaves the house. Seeing Mr. Roland Aveling, she has agreeable visions of new ribbons.

‘Is your mistress alone?’ asks the gentleman, in a whisper.

‘No—master’s with her; they’re on the lawn now, and agoin’ to have tea as soon as I take in the gages,’ answers Jenny, whispering, after another peep on tip-toe at the lady on the lawn.

‘Ah!—I don’t want him to know that I’m here.’

Jenny has a soul for intrigue, and hums ‘Abide with Me’ alarmingly loud.

‘Give your mistress this without Mr. Vane’s knowledge,’ says Roland, tearing a leaf from his pocket-book, doubling it up, and thrusting his hand, regardless of the speared leaves, through the holly-hedge.

Jenny takes the paper—it is very light—in silence.

‘And—wait, Jenny’—the hand is withdrawn, there is a pleasant chinking sound, and it reappears with a half-crown—‘take this. You know what to do with that.’

Jenny’s face brightens and she says, ‘Oh, thank you, sir!’ softly, with a well-feigned accent of astonishment, bending her knees suddenly and recovering her position with a jerk. Then she returns to the greengage tree, singing ;

‘I fear no foe, with Thee at hand to bless,
Ills have no weight and tears no bitterness.’

Presently she goes into the house with the fruit.

‘Be quick with tea ; it grows late,’ says Miss Vane, without taking her eyes from the book, as Jenny passes.

Richard Vane is seated with his back against the tree, writing notes on an old envelope, and using his Church-service as a

desk. He is preparing his sermon for the evening, and has got his inspiration from the green leaves and the blue sky beyond. No wonder the simple folks like his evening homilies.

The cheerful sound of rattling cups and saucers comes through the French windows that lead into the great room of the vicarage. These windows are an improvement upon the long narrow casements which previously existed, and, besides affording facility for egress and ingress, give the room light and air, and a pleasant view of the garden ; they were suggested by Miss Vane.

‘If you please, miss, will you give me the key of the tea-caddy?’ says Jenny, demurely.

‘It is in the caddy.’

‘No, indeed, miss,’ answers Jenny, without a blush.

‘That is strange—I thought I left it there. I will come and see.’

Miss Vane lays down her book and enters the house by the window—Jenny following with the face of a saint.

When they are in the room and beyond the observation of Mr. Vane—a desired end, for which Jenny, it is needless to say, purposely removed the key from the caddy—the

maid says, handing the folded leaflet: 'If you please, miss, Mr. Aveling gave me this for you, miss.'

'Mr. Aveling—when did you see him?'

'Just now, miss, in the meadow, t'other side the holly-hedge, please, miss.'

Miss Vane flushes crimson with anger and shame; nevertheless, the offender is half forgiven as she takes his note; his offence forgiven when, being alone, she opens it and reads the hurried lines:

'MY DARLING MADGE,—I am in great trouble. I want to see you alone. For Heaven's sake don't tell Dick. Ever your own

'ROLAND.'

It is no unusual occurrence for Roland to be in trouble—he hardly waited to get out of one scrape before he engaged in another, and frequently had to extricate himself from two or three at one time. But what trouble can it be that he wishes to conceal from his friend Richard, to whom he has hitherto applied first for help? This conjecture agitates Margaret Vane; at the same time it gratifies her gentle heart to think that he should come to her for sympathy when he



dare not go elsewhere. That is as it should be. A man should lay his whole heart before the woman he loves.

The look of tender pity and gentle devotion in her face, as, standing in the shade, she smooths his little note between her hand, would be a pleasant study for an artist—or her lover.

From this absent state she is recalled to her present position by the shuffling steps of Jenny coming along the passage with an over-burdened tray, and her brother's voice from the lawn :

‘ Is tea ready yet, Madge ?’



CHAPTER XV.

‘THE BETTER THE DAY THE BETTER THE DEED.’

‘**D**ICK dear, I must ask you to let me stay at home this evening,’ said Margaret, pouring out the tea.

‘I thought you liked my evening sermons.’

‘So I do, much better than those you preach in the morning—they come from your head, the others from your heart ; that is why I prefer them, I suppose.’

‘That’s a poor compliment to my head, Madge.’

‘Or a fine one to your heart—hey?’

‘Thank you. You let me off kindly ; yet I dare say the other view of the case is more correct. These discourses that I take six days to write, and then find unfinished, may

be inferior to the sermon I can compose by looking at the branch of an apple-tree for half an hour, and deliver with no other help than a few notes on an old envelope. That disposes of fifteen years' hard study at a breath.'

Richard Vane stirred his tea thoughtfully, and for a few minutes was lost in reverie ; then with a sigh he shook off the mood which evidently pained him, and said, in a bright, cheerful voice :

'Well, Madge, so you won't go to church to-night, hey? Why? Feel lazy? Or is it that you want to get through your novel to-night in order that you may begin next week well with a fresh one?'

'No. I will tell you my reason if you wish it ; but——'

The brother checked her with a graceful movement of the hands and head, and turned the subject immediately, with the finished ease and courtesy of a man that has lived in good society and profited by its best lessons.

Margaret, who had bent over her tea-cup as she spoke, feeling that her cheeks were betraying her thoughts—they had a provoking trick of blushing against her inclinations, looked up at him timidly. He was

speaking upon some subject, she hardly knew what, for looking into his sweet, frank eyes, she could only think what a dear, beautiful man this brother was. The blush left her face, a soft, affectionate light suffused her eyes, a smile curled her lips, and swelled the curve of her fresh young cheek.

The flow of Richard's discourse stopped abruptly, and he said, laughing :

'You are not listening to what I say. I can see that by your expression. What are you thinking about, Madge? Your thoughts are far away.'

'Not very. I was thinking what a beautiful face you have.'

Richard laughed heartily. As a boy he had been 'chaffed' and caricatured for his gaunt, ungainly figure, his ill-proportioned features, and the colour of his skin. His appearance had not improved with age, for Nature, who scattered a few hairs on his face, had plucked out thrice the number from his head, leaving him, as he said, too much hair for a cherub and not enough for a patriarch.

'Let me see myself as others see me,' said he, rising to look in the mirror. 'Yes, Madge, you're right; I grow handsome. Methinks I am marvellous hairy about the

face, and my curls must absolutely be cut. Lilies and not mushrooms underlie my skin, and my nose——'

'You shan't find fault with that ; it's a capital, manly, firm nose ; and your mouth is as pretty as a woman's. But it's your eyes that make your face so beautiful. They are so earnest and sincere and thoughtful, and yet so kind and gentle.'

As she spoke, Margaret, as if by an uncontrollable impulse, rose from her seat, went to her brother's chair, and twining her arm about his neck, kissed him, and laid her cheek beside his.

There was little likeness between the brother and sister, except that her eyes were like his ; for she was ten years younger than he, with a complexion like the inner petals of a pink rose, and features as childlike and feminine as his were the reverse. Contrast exaggerated the characteristics of each, increasing the beauty of one and the plainness of the other.

'If you please, miss, may I go to church this evening ?' asked Jenny, coming to the door. This was a hint the artless maid never failed to give when the hour arrived for her to remove the tea-things.

Miss Vane assented, and the vicar, taking the signal, hastily finished his tea, and then ran upstairs to change his coat. Presently he reappeared in the conventional habit of a vicar; but even in the canonical hat and black cloth coat, and with his waistcoat properly buttoned, he failed to look like other parsons.

He slipped the old letter with the headings of his sermon in his Church-service, dropped them into his tail-pocket, and, putting his arm round Margaret's waist, led her towards the gate opening on to the church meadow. On the way he paused to pull up a weed that had sprung up among the flowers. Would any other vicar at such a time have given his thoughts to such a trivial matter? Yet there was a significance in it—this pulling up of an ill weed the moment it met his eye.

Parting with his sister, he gave her a hearty kiss, and then started off to his business with the air of a man walking out with a pleasurable object before him, which again was a peculiarity in a man holding his ghostly office.

Crossing the stile that cuts the church meadow, he surprised a couple of urchins in

the heinous act of picking blackberries on a Sunday.

Seeing 'parson,' the youngsters bolted, leaving their hook hanging in the brambles. They had a good start, and effected a safe retreat to the stony fastness of the graveyard.

The Rev. Richard Vane, chuckling, possessed himself of the blackberry hook, walked to the little turnstile in the churchyard, and stayed there, keeping his eyes open. Presently he caught sight of something like the ragged end of a door-mat advancing cautiously beyond the edge of a distant tombstone, then a very narrow strip of forehead, and after that two twinkling eyes. The vicar held up his finger and beckoned. The reprobate was caught. Getting up off his hands and knees he stood for a moment irresolute, and then advanced sheepishly, with his cap in his hand.

'Here's your hook; you left it in the hedge.'

'It's Billy Ives's hook,' said the boy, putting his hand behind him as if he expected to be punished with it in the customary way.

'Where is Billy Ives?'

'Behind t'other sto-an, over the-ar.'

Billy Ives, thus denounced, rose from the grave, looking as pale as his freckles and tanned skin would permit, and came down to the turnstile at the vicar's beck.

'Billy Ives, here's your hook. What's that sticking out of your pocket?'

'Hymn book.'

'Your mother told you to go to church, hey?'

'Yäs.'

'And you'd rather not.'

'Went this mårning.'

'And you want to go blackberrying now? Very well, go—the pair of you. But tell the truth about it when you get home, boys. Now, then, off you go; it will be too dark in an hour.'

The boys scampered off, and the vicar made his way into the church. This little episode had delayed him, so he began the service without putting on his gown. When the time came he went up into the pulpit and preached his simple sermon, touching the hearts of all who heard him, filling them with a happiness as calm and beautiful as the still twilight of that autumn evening.

Jenny had preceded her master to church;

and Margaret being alone, could give her thoughts exclusively to Roland.

She took the crumpled note from her pocket and read it again. 'My darling Madge!' With a quick blush she snatched the paper from before her eyes, squeezing it up in her hand. It was the first time she had ever seen her name in conjunction with that pretty term of endearment; she had heard it whispered for the first time only two days previously. 'My darling Madge!' she repeated, in a low voice, to herself.

Smiling, she opened the paper again to read.

'I am in great trouble.' The smile left her cheek.

'Poor fellow!' she murmured, with a sigh. 'What misfortune has overtaken him?'

(As a rule Roland did not wait for misfortunes to overtake him—he went out to meet them.)

'I want to see you alone.' The smile returned to her face as she thought how delightful it would be to console him and alleviate his distress.

'For Heaven's sake don't tell Dick.' That made her grave again. 'It must be something serious indeed that he could not tell her brother.'

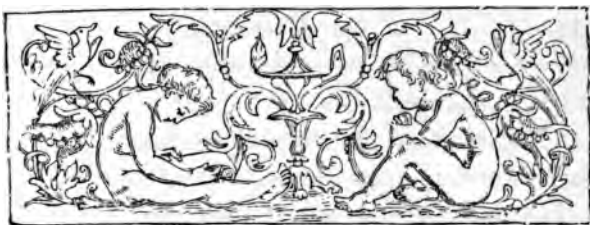
'Ever your own Roland.' Again she smiled. So long as he was ever her Roland, and nothing could separate them, the trouble could not be *very* great—certainly not one that time and her loving kindness might not obliterate from his memory. 'Still he must be unhappy now, poor fellow,' she thought sadly, putting the letter carefully in her purse. Then, remembering that he would soon be with her, the inconstant light shone once more in her April eyes. She looked round at the front gate with a flutter at her heart, and then—ran upstairs to smooth her hair and put on her prettier earrings.

Quick as expectancy made her, these slight alterations were scarcely effected before her ear caught the sound of the latch clicking in the garden-gate.

As she hastened downstairs her apprehension pictured the lover she was about to meet haggard and pale with anxiety, with wild excitement in his eye, and a disordered dress. In the place of this dramatic figure she found Mr. Roland Aveling standing on the lawn by the open window in delicate gloves, faultless fitting garments, and the happiest expression on his handsome face that one could wish to see there. There was a little wildness



in his eyes, to be sure, as he caught hold of her hands and looked eagerly into her face, but it was by no means the wildness of despair or an expression to command commiseration. In a word, he looked the handsomest, most impudent, happiest young scamp in Christendom.



CHAPTER XVI.

ROLAND AVELING.

HAD her lover appeared, as Margaret expected to find him, wobegone, she would have thrown herself into his arms without reserve, thinking only of him, and adopting that readiest and sweetest feminine means of alleviating his distress; seeing him bright, smiling, happy, her generous impulse received a check; she thought of herself, and advanced coyly.

‘My darling Madge, one would think we were still on a footing of formal friendship. Come, I must teach you how lovers should meet; it is so—and thus.’

He threw his hat on the grass as he spoke, encircled her with his arms, pressed her to his heart, and kissed her blushing cheeks.

‘But, Roland——’

‘Not a word for two long moments, and then less solemnly sweet.’

Margaret struggled faintly, and succeeded in releasing all but her hands: these Roland would not part with. She looked down at the grass—she turned her face away, looking over the beds of tangled flowers: she could not look in his face. His eyes were fixed on her, and she, blushing because she blushed, dared not meet them.

‘My lovely little Madge, if you knew how those blushes become you, they would not be mingled with vexation. You are the picture of Daphne, so timid and coy. I believe you would run away from me, as she did from Apollo, if—if—if you did not love me a little bit. There, I leave hold of your hands; I give you the chance of flying, and—lo! you stay. Oh, darling, either I must be much handsomer than Apollo or you ten thousand times sweeter than Daphne.’

She turned a furtive glance to his face, smiling an acknowledgment of her love; then, remembering the note in her pocket, grew suddenly grave.

‘Now tell me what is your trouble,’ she said.

‘You ask me to do an impossibility. I will do anything else you may command.’

‘Oh, why not, Roland?’

‘Why, you dear little goose, I have no trouble when I am with you.’

‘But your note this afternoon?’

‘Ah, then I was in trouble, to be sure, for we were apart.’

‘Was it easier to bear that trouble than to obviate it by the very simple means of coming into the garden in your ordinary way?’

‘Come, Madge, don’t look so serious, or you will make me believe that you are sorry that I have no deeper occasion for your sympathy. Must I break my arm or have some dreadful mishap to be happy?’

‘That depends on whether you value your own happiness more than mine.’

Margaret seated herself quietly, with a thoughtful face.

‘I do verily believe you are vexed because I am not seriously unhappy,’ said Roland uneasily, as he sat on the grass by the side of Margaret’s chair. ‘I am perplexed. Girls do not readily understand practical jokes.’

‘It seems to me the thoughtless cruelty of a boy to impose upon confiding love and inflict unnecessary alarm. It may be wit——’

‘It is poor wit, and a bad joke, indeed, and if I have pained you, Madge, believe me I am very sorry for the past, and will try to behave more reasonably in the future.’

Margaret turned in her chair, and a smile of quick and full forgiveness lit up her eyes as she looked down at her lover. He took her hand and pressed his lips to it gratefully.

Then they sat silent a while, their souls harmonising with the stillness of the evening. The frailest campanula hung motionless on its slender stem, the leaves of the trees did not stir. Up in the blue sky a couple of rooks, flapping their heavy wings, flew over the garden, gravely cawing. The house-martins twitted about their nests, carrying flies to their second brood peeping from the nests beneath the eaves of the old house. In such a moment the heart is touched, and prompts the mind to be ingenuous and true.

Margaret felt the influence, and pressed gently the hand that held hers. Roland, also, touched with the spirit of that holy calm, became pensive.

‘I want to tell you all about it, Madge,’ said he quietly, his voice, usually quick, now slow, and his manner a little embarrassed, ‘for, after all, a little difficulty underlies the

main motive which brought me to see you. I hardly recognised it as a fact until now. I forgot all about it in the delight of first seeing you. I have been bothered ever since Friday.'

'You did not tell me then.'

'The anxiety did not arise till later. Yesterday I departed from home, so you see I had not the opportunity. I have been staying with the Rodneys—my mother's family, you know; awfully precise, uncomfortable people, the men prigs, the girls prudes. You can fancy how dejected and miserable I felt in their society after having yours, and remembering the happiness of Friday. Well, when they all assembled at the breakfast-table this morning, with not a smile nor a bit of bright colour amongst them, I felt that Sunday with them would be my death, especially as on this day they have cold two o'clock dinner, and lock up the library to keep it holy. "What on earth shall I do with myself?" thought I. "Go and see your dear little sweetheart," answered my good genius. Acting on this happy suggestion, I got my lunch at twelve, started off to the station before my fond relations had returned from church, caught the 1.15

train to London, and came on here as quick as the train would bring me.'

'But your anxiety, Roland?'

'Well, that had been on my mind all the while, aggravating and worrying me just like a bad tooth, that will only cease gnawing at your nerves when you go to your dentist and have it out. If it had not been for that, the prudes and the prigs would only have been material for a day's amusement; or I could have enjoyed the solitude of a wood with my pipe and sweet thoughts of you; or I could have written two long letters to you, all about nothing, instead of one.'

'Then you wrote to me, dear?' The last word slipped out of Madge's mouth involuntarily, as a drop that overflows from the full heart of a dew-steeped flower.

'Say that one little word again, darling, and I'll write you a thousand letters.'

Margaret put up her hands to her face, that he should not read there what she refused to let her tongue repeat—an acknowledgment of love.

'Well, Madge, I will say it for you—dear, dear Madge. There! And now I will return to my confession. As I said, I believe it was the fact that I had something on my

mind which you should know that prompted me—in the guise of a selfish desire to feast my eyes upon you—to come here and seek you. I did not intend to say a word about it, for I thought the difficulty might be overcome without your knowing.’

‘If it concerns me I ought to know.’

‘So I feel now, and should have felt at first if I had been a strong, firm fellow like your brother. Oh, Madge, I wish I had more decision of character. To play cricket, to row, to sit on a horse and tear away over anything I get a horse to take—that’s all easy enough to me, and not a chance escapes me; but to see the way out of complicated circumstances, or to do exactly what I ought to do in a critical situation of a novel character, there, I’m nothing better than a boy. I’m not a bit older in such matters as those than when I left Eton.’

‘You will grow older, and, perhaps, wiser; but there are few conditions that call for much strategy if one always does what one’s conscience dictates.’

‘But I’m such a beggar for doing the other thing,’ said Roland, with the most serious face. ‘If conscience says, “Roley, my boy, if you put your nag at that hedge you’ll stand a

good chance of going to kingdom come on the other side ; don't do it," I should just go at that hedge right off.'

Margaret smiled. Women like audacity in men—until they suffer by it.

'Some people would call that courage,' said she.

'Very well, Madge, we'll call it courage too, and you may reckon me the most valiant man in the world at getting into a muddle.'

'You have not told me of your difficulty yet.'

'We shall come to that quite soon enough. Well, having settled that I would say nothing about my bother to you, I thought I could just have a couple of hours here during the time of service, and then bolt back to my anxious friends at Cambridge.'

'Without seeing Richard ?' Madge looked grave.

'Well, you see, if I had wanted to see him I shouldn't have been scouting about with the cows in the meadow this afternoon.'

'But why did you not wish him to see you ?'

'Because I'm such a soft-headed muff, that when old Dick looks at me straight in the face with his clear eyes, I'm bound to blab all

my fine secrets at once. It was so at college : if I got dr— got poorly over night, at the very first sight of him the next morning I was bound to let it all out. You have something of the same power ; I declare I had no intention of telling you.'

'It seems as if you have preserved your intention, despite my influence.'

'I am coming to the secret now. After leaving you on Friday evening I went home and found my father alone. He was in high spirits over the result of the recent election, so I took the opportunity, as we were smoking quietly in the library, to tell him what a dear little girl you are. He was not surprised, for I had said as much a hundred times before. You know I loved you long before I dreamt of making you my wife. He treated the matter in his usual light, careless way, so to make my feeling more definitely understood, I said, "The fact is, sir, I am over head and ears in love with Madge Vane." In a moment he grew quite serious, and replied, "Don't go any further than that, Roley ; I trust your good sense will prevent your committing yourself to any avowal which may lead Miss Vane to suppose you have serious intentions." "Serious intentions!"

said I ; “ can anything be more serious than loving a girl with your whole soul—and, loving in that manner, can an honourable gentleman entertain any intention less serious than that of making the woman his wife ? ” The old gentleman turned as grey as the ash of his cigar, I assure you, and then——’ Roland paused, knitting his brows, and, with a sigh, added : ‘ I will not repeat what he said, Madge dear : I love my father too well to expose his faults, but the gist of the matter is this—he objects to our marriage.’

Margaret listened in perfect calmness, but her cheek was pale.

‘ You were so certain of his consent that I believed you had told him previously of your intention,’ she said.

‘ In justice to you I should have done so, doubtless. I had no reason to expect any objection from him ; he encouraged my visits here rather than dissuaded me from them. What could I expect but his approval ? My proposal was not premeditated—that is to say, I did not come to you on Friday with the deliberate intention of declaring my love ; it was spontaneous, and came, like this explanation, just because I could not help it.’

He paused, and Margaret was about to

speak, when he laid his hand upon her arm and said, eagerly :

‘Madge, I know what you were about to say—that if I have committed the fault of behaving inconsiderately, you will suffer by it ; but that I will not hear from your lips. No !’ he cried, springing to his feet ; ‘you and I are virtually man and wife, and nothing on earth shall separate us. I have kissed you, and that is my bond. You must not wrong me by thinking that I share my father’s views, or can regard them with any feeling but abhorrence. Infirm and weak I may be in many things, but in this matter, where my heart and my conscience, my honour, my manhood, my whole soul are in unison, no inducement on earth can swerve me from my determination.’

His fine face glowed with generous warmth, and resolution gave to his expression just that something which in other moments it lacked. Margaret trembled a moment as she looked at him, and then, with a little cry that seemed borrowed from the mated swallows, she rose quickly from her seat and gave herself to the arms of her lover, clasping her hands behind his neck.



‘But what are we to do?’ she, murmuring, asked presently.

‘Oh, it will come all right at last, Madge love. The old boy will yield when he finds he cannot conquer. I know how to manage him. It’s no good spurring a vicious horse; just let him go his own wilful way till he’s tired, and then use the rein gently—that’s the plan. The beggar thinks he’s got it all his own way, and when he feels the bit at the sides of his mouth flatters himself he’s pulling the rein out of your hand, while all the time you’re guiding the beast just where you’d have him go—dash him!’

‘Oh, Roland, you are speaking of your father!’

‘But I was thinking of the horse, Madge.’

‘Have you begun this treatment? Does Sir Andrew believe that you agree with him?’

‘Yes; that’s the fun of it. Of course on Friday night I was not cool, and we had a regular row; but on Saturday morning I apologised for losing my temper over-night, and, begging he would refer no more to the subject, stated my intention of visiting the Rodneys. That put him right off the scent. He took it that I had fallen in with his views,

became most affectionate, and when we parted pressed a piece of paper into my hand that will pay off all my bills and leave me cash in hand besides. And all the while he deceives himself with the pleasant idea that he's a clever old dad who has got the better of his son. Isn't that a bit of fun, Madge ?

Again Margaret was silent and pensive. Her sense of humour was blunted by deeper considerations, and the point of this joke was painful rather than ticklish to her sensibilities.

In her present position Roland could see only her brow and white nose ; the grave anxiety of her eyes was lost.

'So you will see how necessary secrecy was, and—Halloa, whose laugh was that ?'

A cheery, fat laugh certainly did reach their ears at that moment, and was followed at the next by the click of the latch in the front gate.

The surprised lovers listened anxiously. Every instant was a minute.

As the latch fell again, a voice was heard saying :

'Probably she has gone to church with her brother ; but the old garden is a pleasant place to wait in.'

‘By George, the dad ! Not a word of me for the love of love,’ whispered Roland, as, catching up his hat from the grass, he left Margaret’s side. Fortunately the visitors stayed to admire the beautiful clematis on the front of the house, or they would have caught sight of Roland escaping by the little side gate that opened upon the church meadow.



CHAPTER XVII.

MADGE AND HER VISITORS.

ROLAND was scarcely in the field before he regretted leaving Margaret. The unpleasant position in which he had left her then for the first time came to his consideration.

‘Poor little soul! she’ll be frightened out of her wits; and if the father suspects I have been, and puts a direct question to her, how will she answer? She cannot tell a lie and will not tell the truth. Hang it—that’s like me, to rush at a thing without thinking whether it is right or wrong.’

He stopped irresolute, half minded to return and face his father and meet the worst consequences rather than expose Margaret to an unpleasant interview in his

absence. He stepped back to the gate. It was too late ; his father was already speaking to Margaret and introducing his friend. To return now would be only to make matters worse. Turning his back reluctantly on the vicarage, he walked over the meadow towards the church with the gloomy consciousness that he had acted foolishly if not pusillanimously.

It was a trying situation for Margaret. Her apprehension of his being caught in the act of escaping was not unmingled with a feeling of shame. She found it difficult to compose herself and meet her visitors with a natural appearance of tranquillity. Happily for her, as has been said, they lingered on their way before the clematis, and so gave her a few moments to regain self-possession.

Sir Andrew's friend was a stranger to Margaret, and to this fact might be attributed the slight air of constraint which detracted from the graceful ease with which she usually greeted the baronet.

'We are happy in finding you at home, my dear,' said Sir Andrew, in a parental tone, taking Margaret's hand ; then, laying his hand on her shoulder in an affectionate

way, he said, 'Allow me to introduce you to Mr. Garnier. Garnier, Miss Vane—the little lady Madge I have tried to paint on your imagination.

'And failed to portray because you attempted too much,' said Mr. Garnier, bowing with as much formal courtesy as was expressed in his compliment.

A thin, tall man, dressed with the nicest precision from the sole of his foot to the hair of his head, was Mr. Amadis Garnier. Moving with a quick, elastic step, he appeared at six yards distance to be about thirty-five years of age; approaching within that distance his age increased at the rate of a year for each foot, until, standing beside you, there could be no doubt that he had passed his fiftieth year. His features were fine, his eyes handsome, his expression agreeable—his whole appearance pleasant, but for the assumption of youthfulness, which was so studiously cultivated in every part.

'Mr. Garnier is an artist who has made our old English domestic architecture his study. I have brought him here to see the vicarage, hoping that, with your permission, he would sketch the old place for me.'

‘You have brought me where my inclination will be to study the figure rather than architecture,’ said Mr. Garnier, fixing his eyes on Margaret.

‘If Miss Vane will suffer you to follow that inclination I will gladly relinquish a sketch of the vicarage for a portrait of the vicar’s sister,’ said Sir Andrew.

Margaret responded to these compliments with what skill she could command, but she felt ill at ease. They seemed particularly insincere, coming from Sir Andrew, after what she had heard from his son.

Yet the baronet was not insincere. He felt all the affection he professed for Margaret; and, short of suffering her to become his daughter, he was prepared to do anything in his power for her happiness. Only this very morning, when Mr. Garnier, in the course of conversation, expressed his regret that he was a bachelor, the kindly Sir Andrew’s thoughts turned at once to his son’s sweetheart, and he said, with his usual impetuosity:

‘My dear Garnier, I know exactly the girl you want and ought to marry. She lives under our very eyes here. My vicar’s sister—a charming girl—a most charming

girl! Young, beautiful, well educated, simple, and—and unattached. You are not without money. Thank Heaven you don't depend on your profession (Mr. Garnier bowed to conceal a wince as this careless shot hit him), and the girl—well, I promise you she shall not be without a handsome *dot*, bless her. Yes, that's what you shall do. You shall marry the girl. We'll go and see her to-night. You can write and postpone other engagements to-morrow, take up your quarters here, and go down to the vicarage day after day under the pretence of sketching, fascinate the girl, and marry her in a couple of months.'

It was in pursuance of this scheme that he ordered dinner two hours earlier than usual, and brought his friend to the vicarage, as we have seen. He did not harbour a single ill feeling towards the girl who had been the cause of disagreement between him and his son, but, indeed, loved her better than ever since—well, since his reconciliation with Roland.

It is not hard for a victor to be generous.

Sir Andrew exerted himself to be agreeable, and did all he could to present his two friends to each other in their most agreeable

aspects. Nevertheless, they got on but slowly. Margaret was cold and mechanical, her thought being distracted with speculations concerning her absent lover, and Mr. Garnier had the tact to see that elaborate compliments rather increased than lessened the distance between them. Experience had taught him to economise force. Unnecessary movement was a waste of tissue, and tissue of all kinds is to be cherished when one gets over one's fiftieth year.

There could be no greater contrast than that between these two gentlemen—Sir Andrew stout, florid, hot, over-acting his part as it appeared to Margaret in his effusive geniality; Mr. Amadis Garnier lean, pale, cool, and winning his way by a subtle reticence which best harmonised with Margaret's mood.

The twilight had faded, but Margaret and her visitors were sitting by the windows in the open air when the vicar opened the side gate. Margaret rose hastily at the sound, her heart beating with the possibility of seeing Roland enter. The soft light of the rising moon enabled her to see that her brother was alone.

Sir Andrew introduced Mr. Garnier to the

vicar, who, after a formal salute, turned to his sister and said :

‘Come, Madge, light the lamp that we may see each other, or Mr. Garnier and I may meet again without recognition.’

When Margaret brought the lamp the gentlemen were standing in the moonlight by the window talking of architecture and art. The vicar placed chairs for his visitors and seated himself in a position to see Mr. Garnier. He liked to make himself acquainted with the men he was asked to accept as friends. Looking at Mr. Garnier he found a man whose character was not to be gauged at a glance—a man whom it would take some time to understand clearly. He was not prejudiced by superficial appearances, unless they indicated a radically moral taint ; he found weaknesses in all men’s characters, and liked them none the less for their infirmities ; he mistrusted those only who had the art to conceal their failings. Such men were treacherous in his eyes. He was disposed to like Mr. Garnier for his unmistakable vanity, and because, despite his foppery, he displayed a sound knowledge of the subject on which he discoursed, and evinced delicate and refined tastes by all he said.

‘I am very glad to have made your acquaintance,’ he said, as they shook hands in parting; ‘as frequently as you can, come.’

Mr. Garnier responded, saying that he should avail himself of the invitation the following day, and, taking the baronet’s arm, departed, leaving the vicar and his sister at the front gate.

‘Well, my boy, what do you think of her?’ asked Sir Andrew, when they were beyond hearing.

‘I think her simply the most charming young lady it has ever been my happiness to be introduced to.’

‘Then you would like her for your wife?’

‘I can imagine no greater happiness; but——’

‘But what, but what? But! How I hate that word! What is the objection?’

‘I believe Miss Vane’s affection is already engaged.’

‘Why, to be sure she has had a little affair, and as it was only broken off yesterday, she may hardly have had time to recover from it.’

‘A little affair?’ Mr. Garnier repeated the phrase interrogatively.

‘A little love affair—a foolish girl and boy attachment.’

‘With whom, may I ask?’

‘With, eh—with Roland.’

‘Roland—your son—my friend!’

‘Yes. They have known each other for some years, and entertained a kind of sneaking regard for each other. While it was only an amusement for my boy I did not mind, but when he took a serious view of the matter, and actually talked about making the girl his wife, I signified my emphatic disapproval; and he, knowing my firm, indomitable temper, broke off the connection at once, and is now at Cambridge, with the family I wish him to marry into.’

‘You regard a marriage between your son and Miss Vane as a *mésalliance*?’

‘Of course. Why, the girl’s brother is my vicar—I gave him the living.’

Sir Andrew spoke of the vicar as a kind of valet, and probably estimated him only a little higher because of his education. It was impossible for him to think any man his equal who was not a baronet, a justice of the peace, and an unshrinking Tory. It did not occur to him that he was insulting Mr. Garnier by arranging a marriage for him, which he deemed derogatory to his son. He was of opinion that Mr. Garnier was a very good man,

sufficiently well connected to be entertained as a visitor at the Hall, a man against whom nothing ill could be said. His income was not large, and he certainly did indulge in practical art ; but then he did not paint to earn money. It would be a good thing for Margaret Vane to marry him—especially as that would prevent any further nonsense with Roland, and he would make it also a good thing for Mr. Garnier to marry her by giving her a handsome *dot*, as he had hinted—four or perhaps five thousand pounds.

A sensible man will not resent a slap in the face from an idiot—it is the not unnatural consequence of associating with an idiot ; he may only take as an offence that slap which is administered with intent to offend.

Sir Andrew clearly did not wish to affront Mr. Garnier, and that gentleman was far too sensible to attempt to correct his friend's error.

The vicar, taking his sister's hand, walked from the gate thoughtful and silent.

Margaret had not a word. Where was Roland ? had her brother met him ? Would he be angry if she told her brother ? What was she to do now ? These vexatious ques-

tions came to her mind as she walked down the path by the side of the house which led to the lawn front, casting furtive glances towards the meadow-gate. At the angle Richard stopped, and in a tone of mock reproof called out :

‘Sinner, stand forth!’

The gate opened, and Roland appeared.

‘Madge dear,’ said he, coming to her side and taking the disengaged hand, ‘I hope you have not suffered by my thoughtlessness. It did not strike me until I had left you, that you were placed in an awkward situation; and when I would have returned to face my father, as became a man, I found he was not alone, and that I should increase the difficulty by trying to remove it. You have forgiven me, dear?’

A pressure of the hand was the intelligible answer.

‘When will you learn to look before you leap?’ asked Richard Vane.

‘When I have a wife to teach me,’ answered Roland.

The girl was laying the supper things. They walked down the path—Roland having tied his handkerchief over Margaret’s head; and then he asked :

‘Who was the man with my father? I could not see him perfectly.’

‘Mr. Garnier.’

‘Amadis! he here? Ah, you must know him: one of the best of fellows, the most delightful of companions, and a thorough gentleman.’

‘He seemed to me artificial,’ said Margaret.

‘That is only his complexion. If he would only keep his face clean when he has washed it, and leave off those confounded stays, he would be perfect. I should like to stick Amadis on a desert island for a fortnight without his precious dressing-case. At the end of that time you’d find him as handsome an old gentleman as you would wish to see.’

‘I cannot understand how a man professing to love nature can disfigure himself in that manner,’ said Margaret.

‘An artist makes nature subservient to his art,’ said Richard. ‘Mr. Garnier, with an artist’s enthusiasm, makes an example of his face, and shows the world a specimen of his skill as a painter.’

‘You must know him better, Dick,’ said Roland.

‘It is probable I shall; he is coming here to sketch the house to-morrow.’

‘Then he has come to the Hall to stay. I hope he won’t go before I return.’

‘I think he will stay until then,’ observed Richard, dryly.

Margaret, noticing the tone, said timidly, ‘You will return to Cambridge to-night, Roland?’

‘Oh, of course; I have a return ticket, and I took the precaution to ascertain what time the last train left Woking for London.’

‘That’s like you, Roley—so thoughtful,’ said Richard, quietly.

‘Well, I’m not always a fool,’ protested Roland.

‘No; you took the trouble to find out what time the train left for London, without considering that you would arrive there about an hour after the last train had left for Cambridge. Roley will sleep in the spare-room, Madge.’

Roland burst into a long, loud laugh at his own expense, and then said:

‘It would have served me right to let me go on, and have the misery of a night’s lodging in a London hotel.

‘I shouldn’t have let you go even with that inducement. You and I have a long talk before us after supper, Roley.’

Margaret pitied her lover, and gave his hand another little pinch, which this time implied her sympathy.

At this moment the demure Jenny coming down the path met them, with a bob to her mistress and another to Mr. Aveling, as if she had not gone through that ceremony before, and said :

‘ If you please, miss, supper’s on the table.’



CHAPTER XVIII.

AT STARTING.

WHEN the supper things were removed, and Margaret had gone to her room, the vicar, in his morning jacket, pulled a chair to the window, which was still open; drew up a little table beside it, on which he set his tobacco-jar, a couple of glasses, and the toby of ale that the girl had brought at the last moment.

‘Take that chair, Roley,’ said Richard, crossing to a cupboard. He brought out a box of cigars and set them beside the tobacco-jar, saying:

‘You like luxuries—take a cigar. Your father sent them to me.’

Roland opened the box and smelt the weeds critically.

‘They will do,’ said he, approvingly. It gratified him to find that Sir Andrew had sent a box of his very best. After all! he was a generous old dad.

The vicar sat down and slowly filled his pipe, looking with rapt delight upon the tranquil garden, where his favourite hollyhocks courted the moonlight, and the lawn was dappled with the shadow of the apple boughs.

“The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth His handiwork,” he murmured reverently.

Roland was about to light his cigar; he laid the match aside gently, and looked first at the night, then at his companion. The beauty of the night did not touch him, but the sweet earnestness of this tobacco-smoking vicar brought tears to his eyes and raised a lump in his throat. Surely it was as a disciple looked at his Master.

A moment of entranced meditation, as he pressed the tobacco in the bowl of his pipe, was succeeded by a little sigh, and the vicar, turning from his eupathism, lit his pipe.

‘Well, Roley, what are you going to do next?’ he asked.

Roland lit his cigar, and blowing out the light, said :

‘I can’t for the life of me tell. I wish you would tell me what I *ought* to do. I’ll do it, believe me.’

‘Cannot you see that?’

‘No. I have two or three ideas, but which to adopt I can’t decide for fear of taking the wrong one. It’s like coming to cross-roads when you’ve lost your way.’

Richard Vane shook his head.

‘No, it is not,’ said he. ‘A man with a definite idea of where he wants to go to doesn’t hesitate at a cross-road while there’s a sun over the horizon, or a star in the sky. You’re not an old woman—not even an infant now. The only serious difficulty is, do you clearly know where you want to go to?’

‘How do you mean?’

‘In plain words, have you made up your mind clearly that you will marry my sister or not?’

‘Marry Madge? Holy Moses!—beg you pardon, old fellow—good gracious! what a question to ask? Marry Madge! why of course I will. Haven’t I said so?’

‘Yes.’

‘Come, Dick, it’s too bad to ask such a

thing as that. You might as well have said, "Roland Aveling, are you an idiot, a fool, a scoundrel, a—" Oh, Dick, have I ever done anything, said at any time a word, that might lead you to doubt my earnestness in loving Madge?

'I don't doubt your love for her. What I asked was whether you had clearly made up your mind that you would marry her?'

'I can answer that plainly enough. Yes, I have.'

'Then why do you stop in perplexity, making a pitiful cry about cross-roads, as if you took me for a perambulating finger-post, and expected I should carry you home?'

'Don't worry that confounded metaphor to bits. I wish I hadn't made it.'

'People who make metaphors must stand by them. We will not drop it yet awhile. You know the right path as well as I know you, and you ought to know that you will never marry my sister by taking the wrong one. If you think she may be reached by a sly, roundabout, crooked, easy way, you are mistaken. You must woo Madge openly, as you would a princess. She is indulgent—considerate of the fact that you are only a man—but she is also proud, and if she finds

you are not even a man, or manly, she will refuse to be your wife ; and for that matter I also am not without pride.'

'What a stupid beggar I am ! Why, I've felt this all along, only I never thought it.'

Richard smiled.

'A nice yet definite distinction, Roley. Go on,' said he.

'I felt it was mean and cowardly—I felt ashamed. Oh, Dick, I beg your pardon, old fellow. And Madge, too. I did not realise the affront I was putting on her. Yes, of course there is but one way of winning her, or indeed any girl that is worth having.' He paused a moment, and then added, in an altered tone—'But then what about the governor ?'

'Ah, what of him ?'

'I thought I explained before. He wishes me to marry some one with a title, you know, and does not exactly like Madge.'

'Well, you don't want him to marry her ?'

'No, but I have no independent income, and if he chose to cut off my supplies how could I expect Madge to marry me ?'

'She has promised to marry you, tacitly if not actually, and she will marry you, and not your paternal allowance.'

‘But we must live on something more substantial than air, and unless we emigrate to Central Africa our clothes won’t last us for ever. You see I am absolutely without any independent resource for money.’

‘You have hands and a head—save the mark! You can work, and so can Margaret, if it comes to a pinch. I have no doubt that she has weighed all such fearful contingencies since she promised to marry you; and yet when she bade you good-night in the passage a little while ago I observed no sound significant of regret.’

‘Dear little soul—not she.’

‘She could teach again.’

‘She never shall. Jupiter! Do you think, Dick, I would permit that?’

‘Why not? It is a woman’s natural vocation. She teaches well.’

‘And what should I be doing all the while? Minding house and making puddings?’

‘That depends on your abilities. You could do something, and ought to do it. Nature did not intend one man to live on the toil of another.’

Richard Vane did not hear Roland’s reply. The question which had often occurred to

him returned now to his mind—‘Am I a good servant? What service am I rendering for my wages?’

That was a problem which he knew must be solved before long.

Shaking off these oppressive personal considerations with a sigh, he turned to Roland and gave attention to his immediate concerns.

‘You have opened my eyes,’ he was saying. ‘I see clearly now what I should do. I must work. By George, how I will work! You know how I go at a thing when I once set my mind to it. You know, Dick, how I worked for my degree. It was a deuce of a bother to get me to begin, but I did stick to it then, didn’t I?’

‘Yes, you worked well. You accomplished more in two months than I could achieve in a year. It never rains but it pours with you. Unfortunately your deluge doesn’t come until the earth is cracking for a drop of moisture. You would find it easier to work steadily.’

‘Don’t talk of working easily! When there’s a race to win, you must bend your back and strain every muscle—put your whole soul into it, and swear you won’t be beaten.’

‘You talk as if you had begun your race.’

‘So I have, Dick.’

The vicar puffed at his pipe in silence.

‘Don’t damp a fellow,’ said Roland, in a tone of expostulation. ‘I know what your silence means. You are not so sure of me as I am of myself; yet you must believe I have good stuff in me, or you would not have stuck to me with all my faults these eight years, and suffered me to win the love of your sister. Nay, Madge herself would never have loved me if I was no better than I seem.’

‘I won’t flatter you, Roley, you’re vain enough. Of course there is good in you; you misinterpreted my silence. The doubt in my mind was whether you had in reality begun the race you speak of. You will sleep here to-night, that is settled; and I think I heard something about getting up at seven to-morrow morning to go for a walk with Madge before breakfast. What will you do after?’

Roland took time to consider, and then said:

‘I shall go to the Hall and have it out with the governor. I will tell him that I have asked Madge to be my wife, and that nothing



on earth shall prevent my marrying her. Then he will cut up rough, and—I didn't think of it before—won't that be very unpleasant for you ?

‘In what way ?’

‘Sir Andrew will include you in his anger.’

‘Probably. But that will make little difference to me. I believe Sir Andrew thinks that I must execute his wishes because I owe my benefice to him, but he must understand that I serve a higher Master, and have to do what I think right, not what he deems advisable. Never mind me, I can fight my own battles—go on.’

‘Then if the worst comes to the worst, I must bid him farewell.’ Roland paused, and added in a voice of tender sorrow, ‘That would break the old dad's heart ; I am his only son, and he is so fond of me, poor old chap !’

‘Then depend upon it he will not break his heart. When he finds that you are no longer a child he will treat you as a man.’

‘He shall find that I am firm now. I will be pretty plain with him. He shan't know that I care two straws for him. If he chooses to accept Madge as my wife, and

treats her with as much respect as she deserves, I'll be as dutiful as you please; but otherwise I'll be deuced independent and sharp with him.'

'You must not forget that he is your father.'

'How can I? Hasn't he always been kind and indulgent and loving to me? You can't tell how I love the old fellow with all his faults. I know he is exacting, hectoring, arrogant, and all that; but under that big waistcoat of his there is the softest, warmest heart beating with generous love. I could never think unkindly of him, however unjust he is to me; *but he shan't know it.*'

'Well, well, Roley, we shall see.'

The vicar smiled to think of this soft-hearted, simple Roland concealing his feelings, even from the shortsighted observation of Sir Andrew.

'Anyhow,' continued Roland, after thinking over the stern things he might say, 'anyhow, he shall know the truth.'

'Ah, now you are beginning in earnest. That is the way, and the only way to succeed. Keep to that, be true to others and true to yourself, and you shall win your wife and not want happiness, Roley.'

As he spoke the vicar stretched out his hand and laid it affectionately on his friend's shoulder.

Then the two men sat and smoked in silence with full hearts.



CHAPTER XIX.

THE BATTLE IS TO THE STRONG.

SIR ANDREW was writing in the library on Monday morning when Roland entered the apartment.

‘Roland, my boy! you here?’

The last person in the world I should have expected to see, but none the less welcome for all that,’ said the baronet, laying down his pen, and rising with an amiable smile on his full, fair face.

‘I do not intrude, I hope, sir?’ answered Roland, taking his father’s extended hand and pressing it.

The constraint he felt in approaching the library was removed by the affectionate greeting he received.

‘Not at all, my boy—a few letters that

may be written as well this afternoon as now. I thought you were going to stay with the Rodneys a week, at least. Nothing the matter there to account for your return, I trust ?

‘Nothing the matter there, sir.’ Roland threw himself in a low lounge-chair opposite his father, and, looking down as he collected his thoughts, drew off his gloves. Though the vicarage was not a mile from the Hall, he had gloved. His hands were as white and carefully kept as his father’s.

‘Had you been a quarter of an hour earlier you would have met an old friend,’ said Sir Andrew.

‘Amadis ; I met him with Banks carrying his painting traps.’

‘Surely he did not go round by the road ; I told Banks to show him the path by the fields.’

‘That was where I met him, sir. I was coming from the vicarage.’

Sir Andrew’s countenance fell ; he looked at his son uneasily. Roland threw his gloves on the table, clasped his hands over his knee, and, looking straight in his father’s face, said :

‘I have come to talk to you upon a serious

subject, if you can spare the time to listen to me.'

'We shall not be interrupted here, my boy, and anything which concerns you is of the first importance to me ; you know that.'

The baronet's voice was so kind and gentle that Roland was reluctant to proceed, knowing the pain he should inflict. He had made up his mind to subdue his tender inclinations, however, so, screwing up his courage, he said in a tone as formal as he could command :

'I am afraid that I misguided you the other morning, by allowing you to retain an erroneous impression you had received from what I said as to my intentions regarding Miss Vane.'

'You gave me to understand you had broken off your connection with her, or, at least, intended doing so.'

'I did very wrong, sir ; I behaved unworthily to myself and to Miss Vane in deceiving you with that idea. I am very sorry, sir.'

'Very sorry ! Bless me ! what do you mean ?'

'I am sorry that I led you to imagine I had broken off my engagement with Miss Vane. That was not the fact. I have not

asked Miss Vane to release me, and I have no intention of doing so.'

Sir Andrew fell back in his chair mute with astonishment at his son's audacity. Roland, feeling that he must persevere in the firm attitude he had adopted, crossed his arms and knitted his brows defiantly.

'Don't look at me in that manner, sir,' cried Sir Andrew. 'Hang it, do you know whom you are speaking to?'

'I am aware of the submission I owe you as my father; but in a matter of this kind, where my feelings and conscience are concerned, you must allow me to be independent.'

'I will allow nothing of the kind. Feelings and conscience, indeed! What pretence can a man make to those virtues who has the audacity to scowl at his father in that manner, and talk to him as you do to me?'

'I do not wish to affront you,' said Roland, relaxing. 'You know I love you too well for that, dad. I should like to obey you in all things.'

'Now you talk rationally, Roland, and I can listen to you with pleasure, for you know, my dear boy, that nothing pleases me so well as to gratify your wishes when they coincide with mine. Give me your hand. There,

there, we will forget the past. Now tell me what all this rubbish about conscience and feeling means !'

'Well, dad, I wished to say, as delicately as I could, you know, that I shall always be glad to do as you wish, except where my conscience is concerned; but that having asked Miss Vane to be my wife, I feel bound to abide by the consequences, and that I intend to marry her, whether you like it or not.'

'Then, my dear boy, allow me to tell you, with equal delicacy, that I will permit you to do nothing of the kind, confound you ! What, ask me to consent to your marrying my own vicar's sister ! Why, you will desire me to marry my gardener's daughter next.'

'I shall be very sorry if you do marry the gardener's daughter, but I shall not expect you to be guided by my opinion in that matter. I feel sure you would not ask my consent, and I do not ask yours. I simply tell you that I intend to marry Miss Vane.'

'And I simply tell you you shall do nothing of the kind. Marry a girl who has been earning her living as a common governess--the sister of a man I put in the vicarage just because he was kind to my son and saved

his life ! You wouldn't have me regret that, Roley, would you ?

' Oh, father, how can you ask such a question ? Haven't you shown me over and over again how fond you are of me ?

' Then why will you make me lose my temper and forget what a good son you are ?

' It is because I wish to be a good son that you lose your temper. You would not have me dishonourable—a liar ?

' Of course not.'

' Well, I have promised to marry Margaret, and I must keep my word.'

' A promise of that kind, made in a moment of excitement, is not binding. We can take means to break off an engagement without being dishonourable, and, indeed, without injuring the lady.'

' Can you show me how that could be done ?

' Certainly. Now, suppose I were to settle, say, five or six thousand pounds on the girl, and found a man who would make her his wife—what then ?

' What then, sir !' cried Roland, in a fury. ' Why, Margaret would throw your money in your face, and I would thrash the man within an inch of his life.'

Sir Andrew stroked his shaven chin, and thought it would be well to say no more respecting his scheme to make Amadis Garnier happy.

‘No,’ continued Roland. ‘If I had made no promise, and if I could go from my intentions without injury to Miss Vane, I would not relinquish my purpose of making her my wife. I love Madge sincerely, with my whole heart and soul, and if all the fathers in the universe opposed me I would marry her. I consider myself very fortunate in possessing the affection of such a lady, and honoured by her accepting mine. My only hesitation in asking her to be my wife was that she was too good for me. I’m a fool in a general way, but I consider I have given one evidence of good sense, and that was in rightly appreciating the value of Margaret Vane. I will beg you, sir, to speak more respectfully of her in future. And, now we are upon the subject,’ continued Roland, warming to his work, ‘allow me to make a few remarks about my friend Richard Vane, and disabuse your mind of some extraordinary illusions under which it seems to exist. Richard Vane is not your vicar, and the vicarage is not your vicarage. You did no more than you were

compelled to do in giving the living to Mr. Vane.'

'What do you mean?'

'I mean that you are bound to fill the benefice, to give it to the very best minister of religion you can find, and that you did no more than your duty in giving it to Richard Vane. He is the very best man you know, or that anyone else knows.'

'Do you know that you are uttering opinions of a most radical and revolutionary kind?'

'Wait a bit ; I've not done yet. I say you are bound to give the living, not to the man who will serve you, but the man who will serve Heaven ; and that if you gave it to Richard Vane as a mere recompense for his services, you took a cheap, an ungenerous, and an unjust method of quitting yourself of your obligations.'

'This is insufferable !'

'Stop a moment. I will have it all out now I am at it. If you think Richard Vane and his sister, who have more claim to nobility than many with hereditary titles, if you think they are to be humiliated and treated as your servants, as payment in full for Dick's having saved your son's life, you show how little

value you set upon that son. And I tell you this, sir, that had I known he was to be treated so ungenerously, and exposed to such humiliation for dragging me out of the mill-stream as I was going under the floats, I would have begged him with my last cry to let me go.'

'And forgotten your poor old father, Roley! The poor old dad, sitting alone in the library here, thinking of his boy and building up hopes for his future. Oh, never mind him; he's an old man who has had his day and can live on the memories of his happiness. He can eat and sleep, that's enough for an old man: and he must forget his hopes and his golden-headed youngster. Were these your thoughts?'

'No, by George, no! If it hadn't been for you even Dick couldn't have saved me, for just as I had given everything up for lost, and the water came singing into my ears, I seemed to see all the scenes of my life, and last of all I saw you with your fingers in your waistcoat-pocket fetching out a tip, just as you appeared the very last time you came to see us; then I thought of you, and put out all my strength to get up to the top and make another struggle for it, and, as a result,

old Dick grabbed me with a hook and landed me.'

'Thank God! and that all came about through your fear of losing me, Roley?'

'Yes, that's the truth. Though Dick, when I told him of seeing you fumbling in your pocket for the gold, declared it was the fear of losing another tip that gave me courage.'

The baronet began to laugh; then, suddenly checking himself, said:

'But, my boy, why do you accuse me of meanness? Have I ever been wilfully ungenerous to anyone? What hard things you say to me.'

'Why, indeed, father, I acknowledge I was bitter and unjust, for I know you would not be ungenerous, except by thoughtlessness. But I can't bear to hear anything said against anyone I like. I should have been just as severe with Dick if he had said anything against you, though he's too thoughtful and just ever to do that.'

'He's a right-down good fellow, and his sermons are so clever that it's as much as I can do to keep my eyes open after the first five minutes. I must be more considerate there. I admit I have not regarded the

living in the light you see it with. I must read up about it. Some of these radical notions have a substratum of justice in them. Yes, I'll look it up—perhaps Coke has something on the subject. But you don't seriously intend to marry his sister, eh? You said you were engaged only to frighten me, now.'

'Indeed, sir, I engaged myself on Friday.'

'You never said anything about it, although you did lose your temper.'

'I didn't wish to—to tell you all at once.'

'And then on Saturday you went away, begging my pardon for what you had said overnight, and leading me to conclude you had given up the idea. What was that for?'

'I thought if I let you have your own way at first, you would let me have mine after.'

'Don't you know me better than that, Roley? When I once say a thing, don't I stick to it through thick and thin?'

Roland pulled his moustache, and looked kindly at his father.

'So you thought,' continued the baronet, in high good humour, 'you thought you could wheedle your old dad, hey? But you see it wasn't to be done. I soon found you out.'

'You seem to have got to the bottom of it, indeed, sir.'

‘But what made you alter your tactics?’

‘The vicar. He made me see that I was doing a mean and unhandsome thing to carry on a clandestine affair, and that it was just as bad to deceive you as to deceive anyone else.’

‘Why, so it was; and I have a mind to resent it, too. But, come, it was honourable of Vane.’

‘How else could you expect him to act?’

‘He is a gentleman, that’s certain. But his sister—you can’t deny she was a governess.’

‘So much the more is she to be esteemed.’

‘That’s another of those confounded radical notions. Be careful, Roley.’

‘Well, sir, if you had refused your consent, and cut me off with a shilling, or any absurd proceeding of that kind, I should have had to take a common situation as railway porter, or a cabdriver, or something of that sort, while Madge was teaching in a school, and I ask you which would have been most respected then, Sir Andrew Aveling’s son or his wife?’

‘That will do, Roland; you frighten me.’

‘May I ask when I may have the honour of presenting Madge to you, sir?’

Sir Andrew’s face for a moment expressed

a feeble attempt to resume the offensive, his brows contracting and the corners of his mouth going down ; then the lips gave way, the brows expanded, the eyes softened, and he held out his hand to Roland.

‘ Whenever you please, hang you ! I throw up the sponge.’



CHAPTER XX.

SIR ANDREW FORMS AN INDUCTION FROM A
SIMPLE ARGUMENT.

SIR ANDREW AVELING had never entertained a violent passion for any woman. He had squandered his affections in a prodigal fashion among many in the gay days of his youth, and when the time came for him to *ranger* himself, he married a woman of high position—the Rodneys had an earl in their family—as much from a sense of duty as from inclination.

He could understand Roland's infatuation for Margaret, but not his desire to marry her. From his point of view the young man was throwing away the best opportunity for securing a durable happiness and providing a

substantial satisfaction for the latter part of his life. Sir Andrew's passions were entirely of his youth; they abated at the age of thirty and gave place to ambition. He looked back on his youth as a season of folly; he regarded his maturity as a season of ripe content. To him it appeared that Roland must experience the same change, and would find himself destitute of the means of gratifying his higher aspirations. His wife could add no lustre to his fortunes—nay, she would retard his advancement; for how could he hold a place among the county gentry when it became known that he had married a governess?

He felt, therefore, that he had been culpably unwise in giving way to his son's inclinations, and regretted what he could regard only as an act of paternal weakness.

He received Margaret graciously, and was studiously courteous to her brother—partly in compliance with his son's wishes, partly by reason of the juster and more generous feelings Roland's argument had excited in him, but mainly because he felt bound, in outward forms at least, to accede an equality to the family which was to be united with his own. Nevertheless, he maintained the opinion that

Roland was making a deplorable mistake, and in his heart dreaded the union which seemed inevitable.

But hope accompanies fear, and Sir Andrew, though anticipating ill, was not actually despondent. Roland might change his mind, however constant Margaret should be.

He stipulated for a long engagement. Addressing himself to the vicar, when they were alone one day, he said :

‘They are both very young, and it seems to me of the utmost importance that we should not marry them in a hurry. The evils of hasty marriages come before our eyes every day.’

‘People who marry recklessly before they know their own minds or each other’s tempers are very likely to find their expectations at fault, and the probability is on the side of their being disappointed,’ replied Richard Vane.

‘Exactly so. I am glad to find our opinions agree on this subject. Now, to me, marriage of this kind seems exactly like—let me see now, what is it like—it is comparable to—well, what do you think it is like, Mr. Vane?’

‘Like any other results of thoughtlessness

—a child catching at a bright flower and gathering a nettle.’

‘Admirable! a very just comparison. Then you agree with me that a long engagement is necessary?’

‘Yes. Young people should not marry before they know each other and themselves as well as Margaret and Roland do.’

‘But they have not been engaged ten days.’

‘They have known each other almost as many years.’

‘You surely do not think they ought to marry immediately?’

‘That is for their own decision. I am inclined to think they wish to be married at once, or they would not desire to be married at all.’

‘But should they not be induced to submit to advice in this matter? They cannot look at the matter impartially, as we do.’

‘That is hardly to be expected.’ The vicar repressed an inclination to smile. ‘But if they would take my advice they would marry at once.’

‘And if they would take mine,’ returned the baronet, hotly, ‘they would do no such thing, my dear sir. Sir Andrew left Richard

Vane with the impression that he was obstructive.

He got on much better with Amadis Garnier, when he spoke to him upon the subject.

‘Garnier,’ said he, ‘I ask your opinion, as a man of the world. What do you think about early marriages?’

‘They are very natural.’

‘But do you believe they are politic—wise?’

‘I did not marry young, and see, I am now a miserable old bachelor.’

‘Nonsense, you’re as young as any of them, and no more miserable than I am. I want you to be serious.’

Mr. Garnier made a gesture of attention, and the baronet continued:

‘Here is my son, Roland, as I have told you, about to marry Miss Vane. He worked upon my feelings, and extorted my sanction. You know my objections with respect to the affair. However, I have given my consent, and the young people will be married, unless one or both change their mind. But what I ask, and I think I am not unreasonable in my demands, is that they shall have a good long engagement, in order that they *may*

change their minds if they like. Now, what do you say to that ?

‘It certainly would be far happier for them to alter their views before marriage than after it.’

‘Far better, of course it would. My dear Garnier, you speak like a man of sense.’

‘Very few men and women go through life with a single love affair—I have had dozens.’

‘So have I—hundreds.’

‘And it is far better for their happiness to get all that kind of thing over before marriage.’

‘Exactly. Upon my word, I never knew that you were such a deep thinker. You charm me. Pray continue.’

Sir Andrew knitted his brows and listened as if to the most abtruse reasoning, while Mr. Garnier, twisting his moustache, raising his eyebrows, and speaking with grave sententiousness, continued :

‘Married ladies who form strong attachments with individuals of the other sex run a great risk of incurring the displeasure of their husbands.’

‘Several cases of the kind have come under my own notice.’

‘And, on the other hand, married men cannot transfer their affections from their wives without hazarding public scandal, or involving themselves in very serious difficulties.’

‘It is true, every word!’ cried the baronet, slapping his knee. ‘You ought to be in Parliament, Garnier. You remind me of Lord Claypole—do you know him?’

‘I have not that honour.’

‘A wonderful orator. I shall never forget his speech when he sentenced a drunken tinker to six days’ imprisonment. Excuse this digression; you were saying—’

‘I was about to point out that, while married people must confine themselves to monogamous attachments——’

‘Monogamous attachments — exactly; I follow you.’

‘Bachelors and spinsters are trammelled by no such stringent considerations.’

‘Stringent considerations—precisely.’

‘So that if your son, before the appointed time of his union, were to see any lady having greater charms for him than those possessed by Miss Vane, he might relinquish his present purpose without causing her more than temporary suffering—a suffering which

she would forget when she received attentions from another lover.'

'One moment ; let me see how that follows. Yes, I have it. Proceed.'

'The natural tendency of the female mind is to profit by experience. A young lady, having lost her first lover by delay, would be inclined to make sure of the second by an immediate marriage.'

'I comprehend. But stick to my son and Miss Vane ; your generalities carry me a little out of my depth.'

'Up to this point the argument has been in favour of long engagements, but I am thinking now of an accompanying disadvantage.'

'State it, Garnier, state it ; we will look at the question fairly from both sides. Out with your disadvantage, which I warrant is not worth the hearing ; we mustn't be prejudiced either one way or the other.'

'If,' pursued Mr. Garnier, with the same air of profundity, 'if, in the course of a long engagement, accident called my friend Roland from this neighbourhood, and in his absence Miss Vane, from motives of pique or what not, were to accept another lover, it would be a very shocking blow for him.'

‘If you have no more serious objection than that, I don’t care how many you bring forward. In fact, I should like to hear them.’

‘I can think of nothing more terrible.’

‘Well, return to the other side of the subject then, for you show far greater sense as an advocate for long engagements than in opposing them.’

‘To the graver objection I will add only one of a slight nature.’

‘Let us hear it, my friend.’

‘I consider long engagements as unnecessary to tradespeople, shopkeepers, and men of business, whose occupations protect them from those temptations to which married men of a higher rank are exposed.’

‘What the deuce has that got to do with Roland?’ thought Sir Andrew, emptying his glass impatiently. ‘He is not a shopkeeper.’

‘Long engagements,’ continued Mr. Garnier, without noticing the baronet’s impatience, ‘I say, long engagements are likewise unnecessary even to gentlemen who intend to live a secluded country life—whose circle of friends do not extend beyond their parish—who go to London once or twice a year, who

do not care for variety, but prefer the hum-drum every-day domestic pleasures to all the intoxicating pleasures society can offer.'

'Pish! As if my son is likely to be such a heavy clown as that,' was the mental observation of Sir Andrew, as he filled his empty glass.

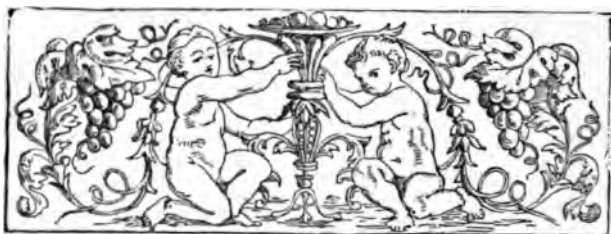
To a man of this kind a long engagement is unnecessary. He can marry without hesitation. His married life will be but the dragging *finale* of a dull tune. It is also an unnecessary formality on the part of young people if the man has successfully resisted the fascinating allurements held out to a wealthy and handsome visitor to the metropolis, for if he overcomes that temptation he can overcome any that may afterwards be offered him; his strength will ensure his felicity in any state he chooses to enter. I really do not think I have anything further to advance either for or against long engagements, Sir Andrew.'

Sir Andrew did not reply. They were sitting over the dessert. As Mr. Garnier came to his peroration an idea came to the baronet's mind. He was in the act of lifting the full glass to his lips at the moment; he checked his hand midway, and set the glass

down untasted, closing his eyes in cogitation.

He opened them and looked at his friend—Mr. Garnier was cracking a nut, with no more expression in his face than the occupation called for—he closed them again with something of a contemptuous smile about his shaven lips.

‘A clever talker, but I was mistaken in thinking him profound,’ he said to himself. ‘Shallow—very shallow. Couldn’t see the induction of his own argument. Couldn’t see that the very arguments be brought up against a long engagement were special inducements to me for insisting on such an arrangement between Roland and Miss Vane. No inductive power whatever—but a good talker.’



CHAPTER XXI.

THE VICAR COUNSELS A SON TO DISOBEY HIS FATHER.

IF Mr. Garnier talked like a fool to Sir Andrew, he spoke like a gentleman, an artist, and a man of sense to his friends at the vicarage. He made himself 'all things to all men,' sinking his own individuality and assimilating his own views with those of the people he conversed with. He talked equally well upon hunting and boating with Roland, upon polemics with the vicar, upon botany with Margaret—being grave, gay, lively, or severe as circumstances directed. To know him was to like him. Margaret, overcoming the prejudice she had taken against him at their first meeting, took pleasure in watching him

at his work, and entered freely into the discussions which he adroitly provoked. He took a paternal interest in the lovers that set Madge at ease, and prevented anything like jealousy on the part of Roland.

He painted well, and made a charming little picture of the old house.

Margaret, who loved her home with a woman's fondness, yearned for the painting, and liked her future father-in-law less than ever because he was to have what otherwise might have been given to her.

'I break one commandment every time I look at the picture,' said she to the artist one day, 'and I would break a second to have it if I were not so afraid of Sir Andrew.'

'I hope one day to paint a home that will be even dearer to you than this,' he replied.

He said nothing of his intention to gratify her wish; but in his spare time at the Hall painted a replica of the picture, had it framed in London, and, on the last of his visits to the vicarage, presented it to Margaret, with a graceful little speech that doubled the value of the gift.

His departure was the cause of regret on both sides. Mr. Garnier, however, had engagements in London which could not be

neglected, but he promised, as soon as they were discharged, to return to Tangleby and be the vicar's guest. The little party separated at the garden-gate of the vicarage, Richard Vane with his hands in his pockets and a pipe in his mouth, Margaret and Roland side by side, following Mr. Garnier with their eyes until, at the angle of the lane, he raised the rose Madge had given him, bowed, and disappeared.

'Dear old fellow, I would have kissed him but for his paint,' said Margaret, as they slowly walked away from the gate.

Roland looked gloomy.

'You are not jealous, are you?' asked Margaret, with mock concern.

'Jealous of old Amadis?' answered Roland, with a laugh. 'Othello could not be jealous of him. Nevertheless,' he added, lapsing into his sombre mood, 'I envy him. It seems to me that artists are the happiest dogs under the sun—everyone likes them.'

'Any man who does his work thoroughly and well is liked,' said the vicar. 'You ought to know that and be thankful.'

He walked on in front.

'What does Dick mean?' asked Margaret, whispering.

‘He means that by loving you with my whole soul I have secured your affection, Madge, and that is worth more than all the admiration of the whole world, dear. And I was ungrateful to forget it for a moment. But, oh, my darling, if I want to be more clever, more admirable in every way, it is that I may be worthier of you.’

‘I do not wish you to alter, dear,’ answered Margaret, slipping her hand under his arm.

* * * * *

One morning, about a week after Mr. Garnier’s departure, Roland walked into Richard Vane’s study, where he was hard at work upon his Sunday morning discourse.

‘Ha, old boy! you’re the very man I want to see,’ said he, clapping the vicar on the shoulder and throwing down his hat.

‘And you’re the very man I don’t want to see,’ replied the vicar. ‘How do you suppose I can work with you here? Where’s Margaret?’

‘Out on some domestic business, and, to tell you the truth, I’m glad of it.’

‘And, to tell you the truth, I’m not. I shall lock my door when Madge goes out.’

‘You’d open it at any moment if you thought I wanted to come in.’

‘But, Roley, you see, I’m at work,’ remonstrated the vicar. ‘Go and find Madge, and come to me this evening.’

‘I should give her my first attention without asking, if my affairs were not pressing. I have something important to tell you. You must give me your attention. It concerns Madge and me.’

The vicar pushed back his chair, looking at his watch ruefully.

‘It is no trifling matter, Dick, I assure you. I had a long talk with the governor last night.’

Roland did not speak in his usual careless way; this his friend noticed, and became earnest at once.

‘Well, Roley, what have you been talking about?’

‘First of money, Dick. I pointed out to the old gentleman that I should like some more definite arrangement than has hitherto existed with respect to an income. I told him I wished to feel more independent, and that I could only do so by having a good lump sum in the bank to pull at when I felt so disposed, without asking his permission or anyone else’s.’

‘A delicate way of putting it, Roley.’

‘Oh yes, I was careful in wording it that way not to offend the governor at first starting off.’

‘Did you succeed?’

‘Well, he didn’t seem quite to like the idea at first, and said he thought I had no reason to doubt his liberality, and all that, which was just enough for an argument on his side: but when I said that I could not be content with any other arrangement, and must have the money anyway, the soundness of the reasoning told, and he gave way. Well, when he yielded I couldn’t help feeling grateful to the old fellow, and I told him so; that touched his heart, and when he spoke of the time when I should have all he had, with no one to oppose my wishes, the pair of us were as chokey as a couple of girls, I assure you. Then what did the old trump do but, wiping his eyes with one hand, he pulled open the drawer in his desk and took out his cheque-book with the other, saying, “Roley, my dear boy, the broker sold out my East Indians yesterday, and there’s thirty thousand lying in the bank to be invested; here’s a cheque for the amount—do what you please with it, and God bless you!”’

‘You accepted it?’

‘Of course I did. You don’t think I would insult my own father by refusing it! Well, having settled that business, I went on to speak about my marriage. I told him that having carefully considered his wish that there should be a long engagement, I had come to the conclusion that I would be married without any delay.’

‘And I dare say for all your consideration Sir Andrew objected to the conclusion.’

‘If you’ll believe me he did. Off he went at a tangent, declaring I shouldn’t marry until he chose, and a lot of rubbish of that kind. He vowed I should not marry for six years, and I—trying to argue the matter out rationally—swore I would go to church in six days if it pleased me.’

‘It is always advisable to speak dispassionately.’

‘That’s what I thought when I gave him to understand I would permit no sort of interference in a matter which was essentially personal to myself. However, he happened to say that he did not know why he should be so solicitous in my behalf when I was so anxious to cut the tie of affection which bound us together, and that knocked me over at once. I thought of his kindness, you know,

and it appeared to me that I was acting like a selfish brute to forget his love.'

'Finally, what decision did you come to?'

'Oh, he wouldn't be behind me in generosity when he saw me yielding, and promised to agree to our marriage early in the summer.'

'That is the time we considered advisable.'

'Just so; but he insisted that I should spend six months of the interval in London.'

'In London! why in London?' asked the vicar, in an anxious tone.

'He thinks it will prepare me for certain offices which he would like me to fill when I become a country gentleman. He wants me to attend debates——'

'The session is nearly over.'

'But there are the law courts, and—and—but that is not his main object. I discovered his real motive in wishing me to spend this time in London.'

'And what is it?'

'He wishes me to see life, to move freely among the society people, and—and—well, Dick, in a word, he wishes to put a crucial test to my character.'

'By exposing you, with thirty thousand pounds in your hand, to temptation—is that it?'

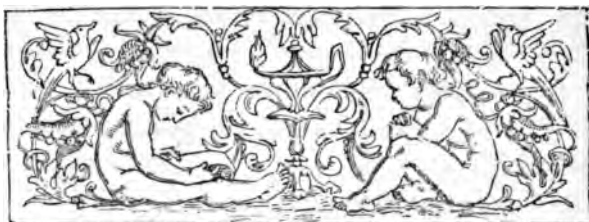
‘Yes, Dick, that is it. His argument is logical enough : I should prove my fitness to live as a good husband to Madge by resisting temptations before I marry her.’

‘Rubbish, Roland ! What argument can justify your exposing yourself to temptations either before or after marriage ? And are you less likely to withstand the attacks of inclination when you are fortified with a sense of duty and love towards a wife than in your present free and careless condition ?’

‘I am not free ; I am not careless. I love and reverence Madge as sincerely now as I can when she is my wife,’ cried Roland, starting to his feet and speaking with vehemence.

‘Well said, Roland ; spoken like a man, and like yourself. Nevertheless, I tell you it is idle and wrong to court danger. Which of us is not in peril ? Who can walk with the certainty that he shall not stumble ? Not I, nor you. I must in this counsel you to disobedience. Refuse your father’s condition.’

‘I cannot, Dick ; I have accepted it.’



CHAPTER XXII.

FOLLY ACCEPTS AN ENGAGEMENT AT THE LEVITY.

THE success of the pantomime season at the Garden was due to the attraction of the new *danseuse*, Folly, a fact which Signor Esperenza would not permit the lessee to overlook. He hinted boldly that a suitable acknowledgment should be made.

The lessee could afford to be generous : the difference between failure and success in a theatrical speculation is a small fortune.

He accepted Esperenza's suggestion without reluctance.

‘What shall it be?’ he asked. ‘The little minx is fond of dress, and never has a penny in her pocket. Better give her a purse with forty or fifty pounds in it, eh?’

Esperenza shrugged his shoulders.

‘She would value a brooch worth fivepence more highly. What is fifty pounds to her? She would give it away and forget all about it. I have seen her give her week’s salary to a crying child. She does not know the value of money, or care for it. She is not a common girl.’

‘By George! she is not. I never knew such a quaint little devil. Well, we will think it over.’

The result of thinking it over was that he bought a watch and chain to present to Folly, taking Esperenza with him to buy it. This was wise; Esperenza knew the girl’s character and what would please her. The lessee would have bought an everlasting English lever; Esperenza set the more expensive watch aside, and chose a light French article, with *all* the jewels on the outside. It was charming to the eye, but the watchmaker would not warrant it for more than a year. When the case was presented to Folly and she opened it, her eyes took the light of the diamonds in which her name was set upon the back.

‘I will never part with it—not even when I’m dead,’ she said; and added, in a lower

tone, 'if anyone loves me well enough to bury it with my body.'

What thought could have flashed upon the young girl's mind at that moment of supreme satisfaction? Had she already learnt that beauties outlive their charms and friends together?

On the same day she received her week's salary. It was just sufficient to enable her to redeem her best dress from the pawnbroker's, and pay what she owed her friend Miss Clip the dressmaker for the past week's board and lodging.

How she was to meet the expenses of the next week did not trouble her.

She had now no engagement. That distressed her only because she would not have the pleasure of being admired and receiving applause.

On Sunday she walked in the Park with Miss Clip. Beyond what she wore she had nothing in the world. Miss Clip, with a nice little sum in the bank, looked like her servant. Folly did not forget that youth was an advantage to her, and she increased the natural youthfulness of her appearance by her style of dress. Her costume was short enough for a girl two years younger than she. Her

beauty was striking even in plain dress, and people stopped to turn round and look after her. As may be imagined, she consulted her jewelled watch very frequently in that walk. She got through Sunday pretty well.

Miss Clip had inserted an advertisement in the *Era* stating that Folly was at liberty to accept an engagement, and the first post on Monday morning brought a letter from a manager offering her a part in a burlesque about to be produced, and stating terms which were less than she had received at the Garden.

Miss Clip read the letter, and then said :

‘Well, my dear, will you go and see the manager?’

‘It isn’t likely that I shall take less than I have been getting,’ Folly replied ; ‘and I think it’s rather like impudence to offer me less.’

‘The manager is not supposed to know what you have been receiving. Your salary during the last weeks was high.’

‘You don’t think I got more than I deserved, do you?’

‘Oh, of course not, dear. But you had better see the manager and tell him what

terms you require. It seems to me an excellent opening. The theatre is a good one.'

'I will see it before I say anything. We will go there to-night.'

In the evening they went to the theatre. Folly was disgusted; the house was not a quarter the size of the Garden.

'It is an insult,' said she, 'to offer me less money to dance in a little back parlour of a theatre like that.'

'But, my dear, I assure you it is considered one of the best houses.'

'That is not my opinion. Half a dozen poky little boxes, a dress circle, a gallery, and no pit. I don't dance to such a miserable little audience as that. You can write to the manager. I'll tell you what to say—"Folly declines to dance at your theatre, and I should be sorry to take your five guineas a week from one who may be more in need of it than she is," and I'll sign my name at the bottom.'

This feat of penmanship Folly had acquired, and the flourish at the end of the 'y' was in itself a study.

'Five guineas a week is a good salary,' urged Miss Clip.

‘I’d rather dance at the Garden for nothing. What is money to me? It’s the audience I dance for.’

‘But how will you do without money?’

‘I shan’t want my dress till next Sunday. I can put that away as I did last week. But if I had to lie in bed all day for want of it I wouldn’t accept five guineas to dance in a rabbit-hutch.’

Miss Clip saw it was useless to argue, and returned an answer to the manager declining his terms, though not in the words prescribed by Folly.

On Tuesday Folly was wretched. Excitement was the food of her life, and she was starving.

‘I shall go somewhere to-night,’ she said, in the afternoon.

‘You have no money, dear,’ argued her friend.

‘That doesn’t matter. You can come with me and lend me some. I shall cry if I stop indoors much longer.’

Miss Clip had an *entrée* to the Oxbridge Music-hall, and thither she took Folly—the audience applauded enthusiastically. In one corner of the adjoining refreshment saloon was a stall on which the portraits of the



artistes were displayed for sale. Folly itched to see her own likeness there.

The singing on the stage amused her, but the ballet, headed by a fat Frenchwoman, excited her supreme contempt.

‘Who is the manager here?’ she asked of Miss Clip.

‘Mr. Manning. There he is, standing over there in a light coat.’

Folly looked across the *fauteuils* and recognised Mr. Manning. He was with several other gentlemen staring at her. Folly was accustomed to being stared at. She met the manager’s eye boldly, and held up her finger.

‘What are you doing?’ asked Miss Clip, nervously.

‘I want to speak to him,’ answered Folly.

The manager made his way down the row, and, coming to Folly’s side, said :

‘I think I have the honour to address——’

‘My name’s Folly,’ said the young *dans-euse*, helping him out of his awkward position ; ‘Folly, of the Garden.’

‘Everyone has heard of you,’ said the manager, smiling blandly, ‘and a very few in London have failed to see you, I should think. I had that pleasure, and shall not forget it.’

‘Thank you,’ answered Folly, with a grateful smile. ‘You are manager here, I think?’

‘Yes. I hope you like the entertainment?’

‘All but the ballet—that’s awful.’

‘All dancing must appear bad to one who dances so well. There are not two Follys.’

‘That’s a nice compliment,’ said Folly, better pleased than ever. Then she added, sharply, ‘I’ll dance for you if you like.’

The manager opened his eyes in astonishment, and, having to say something, began :

‘I should be most happy, but, as you may suppose, I am not so rich as the lessee of the Garden.’

‘That will be all right. I don’t want more than you can afford. Esperenza has no engagement at present : he can arrange the ballet ; and my friend here, Miss Clip, can make the dresses.’ Folly never forgot her friends.

‘I will give the subject my immediate attention,’ Mr. Manning replied, ‘and I will write to you directly I have concluded whether it is possible for me to accept your generous proposal.’

The result of this strange interview was that, after many interviews and considerable correspondence, Folly signed an agreement to

dance at the music-hall for six months, the ballet to be arranged by Signor Esperenza and costumes by Miss Clip.

Once more the young girl saw her name in great letters on the hoardings, with a lithograph in flaring colours representing her in the new character.

The same good fortune she had brought to the lessee of the Garden she carried with her to the music-hall. Her success was complete. Before the close of the first month Mr. Manning offered to double her salary if she would extend her engagement to twelve months ; but this offer she declined at the earnest entreaty of Esperenza. He had opposed her accepting the shorter term when she first told him of her intention.

‘This engagement will be a good thing—a great good thing for me,’ he said. ‘I am growing old and poor, but I would renounce it willingly to keep you on the decent boards of a theatre. It is only fit for strolling mountebanks to dance where men smoke and drink. You are an artist.’

It is unnecessary to follow Folly’s career at the music-hall. She disliked it because Esperenza condemned it.

The old man was her guardian angel. He

continually fostered her self-esteem, and made the vanity which would have ruined another girl her safeguard. Vices were repugnant to her, not from any moral sentiment, but merely because they were practised by the mean, sordid, or unscrupulous people she despised. He did also the very best thing that can be done for a young actress—he showed her behind the scenes. He stripped things of their false appearances and displayed them as they are. Men and women were to him machines with passions for springs, and he impressed this idea strongly on Folly's mind. Probably not one woman in a hundred knew the realities of life, the moral anatomy of men and women, as this child came to understand them under the tuition of Esperenza. He made no reservations in his talk: he called things by their right names, and concealed nothing. Subjects which would have shocked ordinary people out of their senses she heard without a blush. She literally did not understand the meaning of shame—how should she? If the conversation that she constantly heard was not modest, it had at least this advantage—it did not pretend to be.

At that time John Barrington was the

manager of the Levity Theatre—a man who never let slip an opportunity of adding attraction to his programme. He saw Folly, and wrote to her immediately, asking if she were disengaged and would accept an engagement with him.

Before replying Folly went to a *matinée* at the Levity. She was favourably impressed by the lines of carriages along the Strand waiting to approach the doors of the theatre. The admirable arrangements within the house, and the air of refinement in all its appointments, pleased her taste, now revolting against the vulgarity of the music-hall. She liked the size of the house, and the orderly yet appreciative character of the audience. The beautiful scenery, the rich dresses, the tasteful grouping upon the stage, excited her ambition to be the central figure there.

Before the conclusion of the performance she left her stall, and, with her customary impetuosity, found out the manager, and came to an understanding with him at once.

Mr. Barrington was a shrewd man. He saw that Folly was capable of something better than dancing in ballet. After his interview with her he took his dramatic author into consultation.

‘I want you to think of something for this new girl of mine. She’s too good for ballet; besides, ballet’s going out. Taglioni wouldn’t pay now. The public want something more original, and they must have it.’

‘What can she do?’

‘Sing—and sing as well as she dances. She rattled off a little French song as an example that fairly astonished me.’

‘There’s that new thing at the Folies Dramatiques, “*La Friande Chiffonnière*.”’

‘No; I am for something original. The newspapers are constantly accusing us of neglecting British talent, and talking about the decay of the drama. I’ll prove that they are in the wrong, and produce a good sterling burlesque. You shall write me one of the classical sort, like that “*Sisyphus*” of yours. Something fetching, with plenty of popular tunes, a couple of good low comedy parts for the men, and a leading *rôle* for this new girl. What could you do with *Medea*?’

‘Bob Brough used that.’

‘Ah, but we shouldn’t treat it in that way. People wouldn’t understand his wit—it would go right over the heads of the stalls. His style won’t do now. We don’t want poetry. However, if you don’t like *Medea*, what

do you say to Andromeda? That has not been treated.'

'Andromeda? Yes; but she is a simple, tender girl.'

'Just the thing: reverse her character—that's the secret of burlesque. Why, bless me! I know more of your business than you do. Make the girl a rackety young baggage, continually getting her father into scrapes by her persistence in dancing contrary to the laws of Ethiopia. Everyone is infected with the fashion set by the princess, and at length, to put an end to the nuisance, Andromeda is to be chained up to the rock as the only means of keeping her still. You can get some good comic business out of the anxiety of the parents respecting the sea monster, you know. Then we could get a fetching set—sun rising over the sea, rocks, and Andromeda chained in the centre, lime-light on her, and pretty music—display her beauty. That'll fetch the town, I'll warrant.'

'Not a bad idea.'

'Very well; go and work it out, and let me have a rough sketch as soon as you can.'

The idea was carried out with speed; and, after hearing the work read, her part was handed to Folly for study.

Folly, with a new world to conquer, set herself to the task with all the energy of her enthusiastic and vigorous nature. She learnt her part by repeating it after *Esperenza*. She was perfect at her first rehearsal, and exceeded the most sanguine expectations of those who knew her best. It seemed as if she were animated by some madness of the blood, so exuberant were her spirits, so agile and swift her movements. Indeed, she went to such audacious lengths that Mr. Barrington, fearful how his audience might take it, begged her to be more moderate.

‘Why?’ asked Folly. ‘Do you want the audience to go to sleep?’

‘No: but we mustn’t frighten them out of the house.’

‘I will play the part as it should be played, or not at all.’ Folly’s look as she spoke betokened her readiness to throw up the part if she were opposed. Mr. Barrington felt nervous.

‘Well, be careful, that’s all, for my sake,’ said he.

‘I shall be careful, for my own,’ responded Folly, hastily turning on her heel, with an impudent laugh.



CHAPTER XXIII.

ROLAND AVELING IS VIRTUOUS.

ROLAND sat in his chambers at Kensington writing. The letter under his hand was to Madge. An observer with less sagacity than Lavater could tell that by the tender expression on his face, reflected from the paper beneath.

He told her no news. A mere chronicle of his comings and goings were too material for his purpose. He repeated only in roundabout terms the three words he had whispered in her ear a score of times—words which she could hear as many thousand times and never think them old or needless. ‘I love you!’ was the subject of his letter—the beginning, the middle, and the end of it. Only a lover’s

ingenuity could have made so much of so little—could have put a simple sentiment in so many words.

Lovers' letters are tedious or ridiculous to all save lovers, as sacred things are to the heartless or profane. His shall not be repeated here. Let it pass. It was a good letter, that blessed him that sent and her that took it—the sweet, earnest effusion of a soul filled with love. He sighed when he came to the end, broke some myrtle leaves from a bouquet in a glass before him, placed them between the folded pages, enclosed the letter in an addressed envelope, and then sat musing for half an hour with the packet in his hand.

At the end of that time he aroused himself from his reverie, laying the letter upon the table, and then set about writing another in a quite different spirit. First he whistled a tune, then he lit a pipe, and, with a cheerful smile, dashed his pen in the ink and began:—

‘Grandison Chambers, Kensington,
August, 1869.

‘MY DEAR PARSON,—You will be astonished to find that, amidst the distractions of life in London, I can think of my sober old chum

in the country, and, still more, to discover that my object in writing is, not to desire your assistance in helping me out of the difficulties in which you might reasonably suppose I had by this time involved myself, but to assure you that my physical and moral health is untainted by the vitiating atmosphere of this terrible city. For six days I have been exposed to the fiery furnace, and on this, the seventh, I can proudly boast that I am still whole and not a hair the worse. To tell you the truth, old boy, the temptation which besets me most sorely is the impulse to break the agreement with my father, and take the next train that will carry me to Tangley.

‘I can understand the safeguard weak people have in religion, for I am in love, and love is my religion, and with that in my heart it is impossible for me to do anything which seems to militate against it. I refused to take a place in a break with a lot of good fellows—amongst them Stephens of Baliol, Draper of Christ’s, and Burgoyne, who was our stroke in ’59—who went yesterday to Croydon. Of course there was nothing wrong in going to Croydon, but somehow I thought of Madge and you in the quiet old

vicarage, and the very idea of a race was repugnant to me. If these feelings operate so powerfully in trifling circumstances, how effective would they not be in more serious situations! My father and you were both wrong—he in supposing I should find here a test of my moral strength, you in fearing that I should succumb beneath it. Neither of you reckoned that I went to the ordeal under the protecting charm of a sweet girl's love.'

Roland rested from his labours to relight his pipe, which had gone out. He was in a humour to put a favourable construction upon everything. It pleased him to see that he had forgotten to puff at his pipe in writing of his love for Madge. He looked at his composition with satisfaction, convinced that when the vicar read it he would no longer entertain idle fears in his behalf; then recommenced :

'You have no idea how dull and vapid all the amusements of the town are to me. I have lost my relish for them entirely. You remember how the theatres and spectacles used to intoxicate me when we came here at boat-race time: they have now no effect on

me whatever. My days are too long. I get sleepy at ten, go to bed at eleven, and seldom rise before mid-day. I am reading Buckle, and intend to go in for Harrison, Matthew Arnold, and Huxley. The trashy novels of those wretched women who ape the vices of men are revolting to me, and I can only find pleasure in good stiff writing. I have spent three afternoons in the British Museum, and two in examining the collection of the Geological Society, but as I said before, the amusements of London fail to exercise any fascination over me. I have not been inside a theatre ; it is a form of entertainment for which I have now no relish. You must agree with me that you have little to fear for my safety here. The only enjoyable evening I have had was on Wednesday, when I dined with Garnier (who begged me to remember him in writing to you) at his club, the Olympus, where I met several old friends, and made the acquaintance of some exceedingly pleasant fellows, who have promised to look me up.'

With a few more pages of such material as this Roland completed his letter to the vicar ; after which the rigid moralist, to com-

pensate for so much relaxation, threw himself on a couch and 'went in' for Buckle with determination. He read a page and a half, then the book, being heavy, slid from his hands, and his eyes, being heavy also, closed, and he slept.

No one came to disturb his slumbers, and he slumbered peacefully for best part of an hour. He woke with a shiver; he took up Buckle and shuddered again. To shake off the depression of his spirits, he went to the window and looked out. Rain was falling; the leaden clouds overhead were only less cheerless than the empty wet street below. He felt more than ever that the gay London life had no charms for him.

'Not five o'clock yet,' he murmured, pulling out his watch. 'What the deuce shall I do? Somehow I don't feel like reading Buckle, and the British Museum's closed—it's a national disgrace to close that place so early. I can't go to bed yet—what on earth shall I do for the next five or six hours? I shall go mad; well, that will be pleasant as a variation from this condition of things. Five o'clock—what the dickens shall I do? I must have another turn at Buckle.'

Pushing his fingers through his hair and

yawning violently, he turned once more to Buckle's massive tome.

'This man knew too much,' he thought, turning to the last page to see the number of it. 'If he had written a small volume it would have been much better. Fool to write himself out as he did! Halloa! what's that?'

He threw down the book, and rushed to the window in great excitement as the sound of a double knock reached his ear. Looking down, with his forehead pressed against the glass, he saw a blank doorstep below; pressing the back of his head against the shutter and the side of his nose against the window, he discovered a visitor waiting on the step next door but one.

'Light overcoat, umbrella,' said he, with much interest. 'I don't know the man's figure; surely it can't be a visitor for me gone next door but one by mistake.'

Despite the improbability of the conjecture, he felt disappointed when the man in the light coat disappeared and he heard the door close behind him.

The pendule on the mantelpiece struck five.

'What is the use of a timepiece if it

doesn't strike right?' thought he, dragging out his watch petulantly to see how much too slow the offending clock was. The time by both was the same.

'I'll have that thing taken away,' said he, 'I hate clocks that strike. Only five o'clock. Where did I put Buckle?'

Looking round for the book he perceived the two letters on the table. He seized them joyfully and caught up his hat.

'What a thoughtless fellow I am! A little later and they would have been too late for the post.'

He rushed to the pillar-box in the adjoining square, and returned with a dull step to the inevitable Buckle. That great man was never perhaps regarded with such unmerited dislike as then. He admitted himself reluctantly to the house, without noticing the hansom standing before the door, and as he dragged upstairs reflected on the delusiveness of hope and the insincerity of friends.

'Those fellows promised to look me up; and here have I been expecting them all day, and not one comes near me.'

At his apartments he kicked the door open without taking his hands from his trousers pocket, and confronted Mr. Garnier.

‘My dear Roland, you are surprised to see me—pardon my intruding upon your chamber in your absence—the attendant below said you were at home.’

‘Believe me, my dear fellow, I would not have forgiven her had she been more careful to tell the truth. I wouldn’t have had you go away for the world. I am delighted to see you.’

‘I believe you. You have certainly the most expressive of faces; you cannot imagine the change it has undergone in two minutes.’

‘I was a little dull.’

‘And no wonder, mewed up in solitude here. Your father asked me to look after you, and I should fail in my respect to his commands if I suffered you to bury yourself in this fashion. What are your engagements? Where do you dine?’

‘I have ordered a chop to be brought to me at six.’

‘You must order your *chef* to put the joint back for your breakfast. You dine with me to-night.’

‘But—but I’m going in for Buckle,’ said Roland, offering a feeble show of resistance.

‘You’ll “go in” for dinner at the Criterion, and “go in” for a theatre after.’

‘I don’t care for theatres.’

‘You can take Buckle to read there, if you don’t care for the performance. One thing is certain, I cannot allow you to read him here. I have a hansom waiting below. Have you any alteration to make in your dress?’

‘You are in war-paint.’

‘Yes, but it isn’t necessary if you prefer morning dress.’

‘I think I prefer the other. It is so much easier—and—and if we are to go to a theatre.’

‘You have brought yourself to accept that infliction, eh? Well, dress away, old fellow.’

Roland went into the adjoining room and got out his evening dress—the very sight of the white tie excited pleasant ideas. Something of his old enthusiasm came back as he hurried over his toilette, and he kept up a brisk conversation with his friend in the next room. When all was complete, he came out radiant, with his hat under his arm and a pair of light gloves in his hand.

‘Now then, Amadis, let us be off; I’m ready,’ he cried.

‘Will you take Buckle?’ asked Garnier, slyly.

‘Oh, hang Buckle! Come on.’



CHAPTER XXIV.

ROLAND AVELING SEES FOLLY FOR THE FIRST
TIME.



AS the two men sat over their wine smoking, Garnier took up a paper. 'Where shall we go?' he asked, turning the paper to get at the theatrical announcements.

'Anywhere.'

'Polytechnic, Exeter Hall—either of those suit you?'

'Try another joke; it can't be worse.'

'Ha, here's the thing, "Levity, first night of 'Andromeda.' Folly, as Andromeda. First appearance." By George, we must go there. Have you seen Folly?'

'Folly? No; who is he?'

‘*He* is simply the most astonishing young girl you ever saw in your life. She played in the pantomime of the Garden last Christmas, and since then has been throwing her pearls before a music-hall audience. I thought she wouldn’t stay there long. Barrington’s a clever fellow—doesn’t let talent escape him.’

‘I admire talent.’

‘And you’ll admire her face, too—the loveliest little girl.’

Roland did not respond; he thought of another lovely face, and his heart carried him away to the quiet vicarage at Tangley.

‘Why are you suddenly grave, Roland?’

‘Nothing. What is to be heard at Exeter Hall?’

Garnier, looking at Roland, was silent a moment, then he said in his kind, low, paternal tone :

‘My dear boy, I can trace your thoughts. I know your hesitation, and admire you for it. I know the secret of your dulness, the motive that prompts you to seek seclusion and comfort from Buckle. You think it disloyal to one far away to be happy absent from her. But is it not a false sentiment with which you delude yourself? Would she

be more happy, knowing you were less? That is not in her generous nature. You do yourself and her injury forcing your inclinations thus. In deceiving yourself you deceive her. Deception, believe me, is the root of all evil. If you prefer "Israel in Egypt" to "Andromeda" at the Levity, let us go to Exeter Hall by all means, but do not think that ignoring cakes and ale will make you more virtuous. There, my lecture is over.'

'Thank you, Garnier; thank you very much, old fellow. You show me what I failed to realise. I will be honest. We will go and see "Andromeda," and we will enjoy it, too,' answered Roland briskly, and with a grateful feeling at his heart to the man who had shown him his error.

The wine finished, they lit fresh cigars, sent for a hansom, and reached the theatre just at the conclusion of the operetta with which the entertainment began, and in time to get a couple of stalls in the fifth row. By the time the overture commenced there was not a seat unoccupied.

The overture came to an end, and the leader, *bâton* in hand, looked to the prompt side for the signal to commence the chorus

with which the curtain was to rise. A movement of the curtain showed the stage-manager shaking his head. The leader sat down. Evidently there was a hitch somewhere. The audience began to demonstrate impatience in the usual noisy manner. Still the curtain did not rise. The stamping of feet and thumping of umbrellas increased, and the gallery added hisses to the noise.

"The curtain must go up, or we shall be damned to a certainty," said Mr. Barrington, catching the ominous sounds from the front. 'Orchestra, Brooks, begin. Where's Miss Stuart? She will have to read the part if the little wretch isn't here in time. You must spin out your comic business, Yates, and gag. I am not surprised that the girl has served us in this way. I expected as much from her temper over the dress.'

Folly had not arrived.

During the past few weeks she had given Mr. Barrington cause to regret that he had ever seen her. Scarcely a rehearsal passed without her opposing her own judgment to that of the author, the stage-manager, the *chef d'orchestre*, or some one engaged in the performance, and with such indomitable stubbornness as to enforce compliance with her

views. At the last rehearsal she refused to wear the dress provided for her first entrance—a classical toga and robes of white cashmere, trimmed with gold.

‘Do you think I will make my first appearance at this theatre in a sheet like that?’ she asked indignantly.

‘It is the dress designed for the purpose. There is no time to alter it. You must wear it,’ answered the stage-manager, viciously scowling at her.

‘Ah, we shall see about that,’ was all she said in reply.

She sulked through the rehearsal, and made no answer when Mr. Barrington cautioned her not to be late. The curtain rose, and the burlesque began.

Folly was not in her dressing-room at the moment she should have been on the stage. Yates was getting nervous over his comic business, which fell flat; the audience never once smiled at his gag. The procession of virgins stood ready at the wings, with Miss Stuart at their head, in Folly’s rejected dress, with the book in her hand; and Mr. Barrington was just preparing to go on to the stage and apologise for the absence of Folly, when a dozen voices behind him suddenly exclaimed,

‘Here she is!’

‘We’re waiting for you,’ hissed the manager, looking as if he would like to strike the offending actress.

‘No, you’re not,’ answered Folly. ‘Yates hasn’t given the cue to the band yet.’

‘How can he?—he’s waiting for you. No words. I command you to dress at once. Miss Stuart——’

Folly, turning, caught sight of Miss Stuart in her dress, and burst into a peal of laughter that was heard in the remotest part of the house. Before the echo died she threw off the hooded cloak that enveloped her from head to foot, and, with a signal to the orchestra, skipped on to the stage with her virgins at her heels.

‘Good heavens! how is she dressed?’ cried the author and Mr. Barrington in a breath.

In place of the costume which Andromeda might have been supposed to wear on such an occasion, Folly appeared in a dress suitable to a young lady of fifteen in a ball-room at the present time. It was of white satin, shot with a tint of roses, fitting without a crease to her round, graceful figure, and descending almost to her ankles. Kid gloves

of the same delicate colour came half way up her arms, which were bare from the shoulder. French shoes and gold clocked stockings, with an abundance of white lace frilling, made up a costume that set chronology and stage propriety completely at defiance. It was in keeping with nothing but Folly and her independent, daring spirit.

She did not give the spectators time to think of anachronisms; she carried them along with her in a headlong, impetuous rush of gaiety and life that would not admit of thought or reflection. She astonished the audience, and even those who had acted with her in rehearsal, so that in watching her they at times forgot their parts. The weakest joke in that feeble piece came from her lips sparkling. Her audacity, her beauty, the grace of her movements, the charm of her voice, all told upon the audience with an intoxicating effect. Even those whom she had lately angered could not but admire and forgive the bewitching girl. Nothing tired her. She was not still for a moment, except in the scene where she was chained to the rock. Then, knowing that her success depended on the simple effect of her beauty, she posed herself for effect, so that

Ovid's line was realised by her unconsciously :

‘Marmoreum ratus esset opus !’

That idea struck Roland as he gazed at the wonderful stillness and beauty of the girl standing in the brilliant light.

A murmur of delight arose among the spectators, and gradually swelled into a great wave of applause, that rolled to the feet of the young actress, which Folly, moving from her pose, acknowledged with a couple of nods, her head on one side and an arch smile on her face.

‘Oh, what an exquisite little beauty!’ murmured Roland, lending his hands and voice to swell the meed of approbation.

END OF VOL. I.

